



PRESS RELEASE

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To Trade Press, Construction Industry

CEA Clarification on Quick Coupler Standards

The Construction Equipment Association is closely involved in the revision of the European standard that covers quick couplers (EN474-1) and in the project to develop an international standard for them (to be ISO 13031). The purpose of this press release is to clarify the position as regards the current situation and likely future developments.

The standards work follows concerns raised by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) over accidents occurring with semi-automatic types of couplers. In order to be safe these require the manual operation of a safety device on the coupler (usually the insertion of a safety pin) after the picking up of each bucket. This type of coupler is no longer being placed on the UK market as requested by HSE. Existing semi-automatic couplers can continue to be used provided that the safety pin is inserted properly each and every time the coupler is used. Automatic quick couplers are those where a safety device engages when the bucket is picked up without any manual action being required from the operator. All the hydraulically powered couplers placed on the UK market now should be the automatic type.

Some recent communications have led to a misunderstanding of the status of discussions in the drafting of the new standards relating to automatic couplers. For example, certain contractors have announced their intention to ban all semi-automatic and automatic excavator quick couplers from their sites that do not lock onto both pins of the bucket. Contrary to some assertions in the market it is not clear that this view will be carried through into the new standards – as those standards are still very much under discussion. It is too early to say what the outcome will be after careful consideration of all the arguments. It is, however, the intention of all those involved in developing the new standards that semi-automatics will be ruled out.

A new edition of EN 474-1 is due shortly, but this is not related to quick couplers. A change related to quick couplers is expected to be published towards the end of 2010, with its mandatory application being some time around mid 2012. Couplers sold in the EU after that time will need to conform to the new safety level of the standard.

ISO 13031 will be worked on over the next two years and, after publication in around 2011, will gradually become the norm worldwide. It is the intention of all those involved in the standards committees that the two standards should not conflict with each other.

Malcolm Kent, Technical Consultant to the CEA, said "Everyone involved in writing the new standards is determined to make sure that only safe couplers are put onto the market in future. Operators need to be confident that what they are using is safe so long as they use it properly. There are a number of good couplers on the market and people should have a good look around before making their choice."

Ends

Notes for Editors:

1. There are two separate technical issues that must be considered in the discussion of quick coupler safety features:

- a) **In the event of a complete failure of the hydraulics**

If there is a complete failure of the hydraulics of the coupler (say, a failure of the cylinder seals) some couplers are designed such that the safety device would allow the bucket to swing on one pin. On the other hand there are design concepts whereby the bucket would stay more or less in its normal position, but perhaps rattling loosely on the pins, that is, it would be retained on both pins.

- b) **When picking up a bucket**

Some couplers on the market are designed such that they latch onto the front pin as the first step in picking up a bucket. The bucket can then swing on the front pin until the operator curls the tipping link fully and completes the engagement of the bucket on the coupler. This design feature is not under discussion in the standards committees so there is no reason to think that it will either be ruled in or ruled out in future standards. Most likely it will remain an option about which designers and customers can make a choice.

It is possible for couplers to have any combination of the two features described above. Also, and as a matter of course, manufacturers of quick couplers need to ensure that their products perform as intended. That is, that the safety mechanism, whatever design concept they choose, is actually strong enough to retain the bucket securely in the event of a failure of the main system that holds the bucket for digging operations.

2. The CEA is the recognised trade association for manufacturers and importers of construction equipment in the UK and their component and accessory suppliers. It has around 100 members.

The construction equipment industry is worth an estimated £8.5 billion to the UK economy - with companies exporting an average of 75% of their production - and employs some 57,000 people.

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