

Editorial

As I write this column, we are right in the middle of what is turning into one of the most successful Canal Camps seasons for years, in terms of the volunteer numbers, the work achieved - and even the weather!

But I'm afraid that first I'm going to have to deal with something a little less cheerful: site safety, and one specific hazard in particular.

Please take the time to read the following: it may affect you even if you are not an operator of these machines, and even if you do not know what a skip-loading dumper is...

Skip-loading dumpers

As mentioned in the Camp Report on p13, a volunteer suffered broken ankle bones as a result of an accident involving a skip-loading dumper.

These dumpers are the small - typically 750Kg load - narrow wheelbase dumpers that have become available in the last few years, which are equipped with a telescopic mechanism under the bucket enabling it to be raised and tipped into a skip. (*see photo on opposite page*)

Initially these seem to be very useful devices: being narrow they can get into places that the more conventional dumpers we use cannot; also their ability to tip at high level can be very handy. However, the downside of both of these features is that they do not have the lateral and front-to-back stability of a 'normal' dumper.

EVEN WHEN THE BUCKET IS NOT IN THE RAISED POSITION, THEY ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO TIP OVER SIDEWAYS (OR FRONT TO BACK) IF THEY ARE NOT ON COMPLETELY LEVEL GROUND. This is what happened on the Wey & Arun Camp, and the driver's leg was trapped under part of the dumper when it fell.

There are some important lessons that all of us must learn from the accident:

Firstly, machine operators using this type of dumper should be aware of this lack of stability, and avoid taking the dumper onto uneven or steeply-sloping ground.

Secondly, site leaders considering using these machines should think carefully about whether it is the best tool for the job. Can the work be done in a way that ensures that the machine stays on level, even ground throughout? Could the work be done in a different way, so that a conventional dumper (or for that matter a wheelbarrow) could be used?

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Even if it turns out that the skip-loading dumper is the best, safest option for the job, the leader needs to ensure that it is not used for other, less appropriate work - dumpers are handy things, and if we have one on site we have a habit of putting it to good use on all sorts of other jobs besides the one that we hired it for.

Thirdly, our instructors (myself included) need to make very sure that whenever we train a new dumper operator, we make them fully aware of the differences between the machine we are training them on and the various other types that they may come across. It's no good us extolling the go-anywhere capabilities of the conventional 4-wheel drive 3-tonner we're training them on, only for them to come unstuck when they are faced with a skip-loader sometime later while no longer under supervision.

Fourthly, all you volunteers need to do your best to spread this information far and wide so that everyone - whether they read 'Navvies' or not, whether they are from WRG, one of the other mobile groups or a local canal society - is aware of this potential danger.

Finally, the above comments should not be taken as criticism in any way of NWPG whose safety record has been very good. In this - the first serious accident they have had in many years of successful camps - they did all the right things: deal with the incident (in this case free the trapped person, then get them medical attention), then contact the insurers and fill in the correct forms, then work out how the accident happened, then decide how to prevent it happening again.

And in the unlikely event that a serious accident of any kind happens on your work party, you should deal with it the way that NWPG did, rather than taking the kind of 'these things happen' attitude that nobody will ever learn anything from.

Canal Camp reports

I'll finish on a happier note by thanking everyone who has sent camp reports and photos. **Please keep them coming in.** The next 'Navvies' will be a bumper-size issue with eight pages of colour (thanks to Chris Spencer for generously sponsoring the colour printing again) - now it's up to you to provide some good quality content for those pages.

See you at the 'National'!

Martin Ludgate