Waterfed Pole Safety

by RHG Products Company, www.RHGProducts.com

Great care should be taken while using a waterfed pole. The following are a number of topics to be aware of while using a waterfed pole.

Trip Hazards (trailing hoses): Due to the nature of waterfed poles, there is constantly a hose running across the jobsite. It is important to mark these areas with signage to let others in the area know about the presence of trailing hoses.

Trip hazards (while using the poles): Due to the fact that you will often be looking up while operating a waterfed pole, it is important to know your surroundings. Tripping while moving equipment can and will occur if you are not careful.

Slip hazards (water left on ground): Often times there will be standing water left behind from using a waterfed pole system. Either from runoff from cleaning the window or from RO systems' concentrated water streams. It is important to mark these areas with signage to let other know of the standing water.

Slip hazards (freezing water in colder temperatures): In the winter it is especially important to be aware of standing water due to its ability to freeze on the ground. It is a good idea to pack ice melt in your vehicles in the winter months so that you can apply it to these areas. It is important to use proper signage to let passersby know about the presence of water on ground surfaces.

Electrocution (overhead power lines): Be sure to take care while working near overhead power lines. All waterfed poles can and will conduct electricity.

Electrocution (lightning storms): It is best to go indoors during power storms. All waterfed poles can and will conduct electricity.

Possible electrocution from shorts or faulty wiring in solar panels: Great caution should be taken when cleaning solar panels due to the presence of electricity. Consult with an expert regarding solar panels before cleaning them with a waterfed pole.

Editor's Note: As I'm putting this issue together, a trial is taking place in San Diego, California, involving a window washer who is suing the local electric company. In 2008, a window washer was starting a routine cleaning of a three-story home when his 7-foot pole struck a power line that was close to the residence. The article says he felt his arms freeze up as he fell to the ground, "smoldering."

The 34-year-old window cleaning contractor woke up following a 72-hour induced coma to learn that the electrical shock had destroyed the veins in his arms, and his arms had to be removed. Describing himself as an "active guy," one can only imagine the torment of waking up to realize that not only could he no longer earn a living as a window cleaning contractor, his lifestyle – which included activities like rock climbing and bike racing – had drastically changed in an instant. He has also since run up medical bills in excess of $9 million.

As of the time of this issue's publication, a decision in the lawsuit has not been determined. However, the point is this: Be extra careful out there, and use extra caution when using poles – waterfed or extension – of any kind.

Daily equipment checks: It is important to visually inspect your waterfed pole for any visual problems with the equipment. Any problems should be repaired before continuing use.

Injury from falling objects: Be aware of your surroundings and check your equipment regularly for loose parts.

Injury from falling poles: Be aware of your surroundings and know that if your pole comes down it will come into contact with something or someone that is not aware of where you are working.

Injury to self from incorrect handling of equipment

1. Reducing fatigue (techniques): It is important to use proper technique to reduce the risk of fatigue and/or injury. When working at lower heights (25' or so), it is possible to rely mainly on your arms to do the work. But as you begin to work at greater heights, it becomes more and more important to use your legs to help reduce fatigue. This is done by stepping towards and away from the building, using more of your body – and less of your hands to move – the pole/brush up and down the window.

2. Proper handling (lifting, lowering, repositioning): The proper way to extend a waterfed pole is by placing the brush head up against the building and extending it upwards. While doing so, it is important to have the brush head on the building to support the pole and weight. Larger poles may need to be lifted differently with the assistance of a second person. This method is called footing. To properly lift a larger pole, simply extend a number of sections and have one person put their foot at the base of the pole. Then have the second person begin to walk the pole up into the air towards the person footing the pole. Once the pole is upright the person footing the pole should lift the pole and lean it onto the building. To lower the pole simply collapse it via the clamping mechanism or have a person foot the pole and slowly walk it down. While using the 'footing' method as with any other circumstances, it is important to be ware of your surroundings. Be especially aware of any power lines in the area as contact with power lines will cause electrocution and possibly death.

Recovering a pole that has started to fall: Occasionally a pole will begin to fall in use if the operator is distracted or even if the wind happens to flare up without notice. To recover a pole that has begun to fall while in use it is best to step in the direction of the fall to attempt to recover the pole and bring it back to a vertical position.

RHG Products Company is the exclusive U.S. distributor of Gardiner Water Fed Pole Systems. To learn more, go to www.RHGProducts.com.