



COVERING OPEN LIFT BUCKETS

AN ERGODYNE WHITE PAPER

INTRODUCTION

There are many options for hauling tools and equipment to and from job sites. Vehicles, hand carts, boxes, bags—all get your stuff there and back just fine.

But after you get your stuff to the job site, what if you need to lift it or lower it to where work is actually being done?

In this scenario, you have fewer options. When work locations are not at ground level, it usually means a container and haul line are needed to safely bring materials up and lower them down.

So what's a suitable container? Your standard toolboxes and 5 gallon plastic buckets are not the best choices. Neither option is tested or rated for this type of lifting. Although they may adequately support a load on the ground, wire bails and handles often give way in the air when a load shifts or starts to swing. Whether the contents make it safely to the top or lie scattered on the ground rests solely on the integrity of their latches and handles.

As an alternative, canvas lift buckets have traditionally been used by utility workers, iron workers, arborists, tower workers, and others as a proven means for hauling tools, parts, and materials—basically anything that fits—up to elevated workers.

They are the best option out there; however, all of the canvas lift buckets on the market today have one, glaring problem: they are open at the top.

PUT A LID ON IT

On Earth, gravity isn't a theory. It's a fact that we all understand and respect. We have all tipped something over, spilled parts, or dropped something while at heights. So good practice would dictate that if the stuff we are hauling is important—or could create a hazard if spilled—we should use a container with a closed top. In other words, we need to keep the good stuff in and the bad stuff out. We do this when we buy a cup of coffee, so shouldn't we apply the same principle to any lift bucket that can travel up to hundreds of feet in the air?

KEEPING THINGS IN

Generally, canvas lift buckets are pretty good at hauling stuff. However, winds increase significantly at higher elevations and buckets can swing or bounce against structures and result in dropped equipment. In coastal areas, plains, or around a helicopter wash zone, these wind risks are amplified.

Dropping heavy items out of a bucket can cause substantial injuries and damage both property and equipment. This is especially critical at busy work sites or areas where foreign object damage (FOD) is a big concern. If open tool

pouches are forbidden on a particular site, open haul buckets should be forbidden as well.

In addition to FOD, there is a productivity effect with spilled materials. The downtime needed to retrieve items can be long, especially when up and down access is difficult. And if critical items get lost in mud, sand, water, or snow, delays can be even longer. In some instances, a project may be forced to a halt until spilled items are recovered or entire systems are replaced.

KEEPING THINGS OUT

Besides keeping important things in the bucket, an effective cover also helps keep undesirable stuff out. In exposed locations, workers and their tools may be battered by natural elements like snow, rain, leaves, and bugs. Job specific debris, like dust, dirt, sand, paint chips, or rust scale, is also a concern. But this problem is not exclusive to outdoor work. Elevated work inside large facilities, in places where the janitor normally does not visit, or in underground locations often involves drips and debris falling from above. Outside or inside, bucket covers keep out the unwanted debris that contaminates tools, fasteners, and supplies.

PRODUCTIVITY AND SECURITY

Besides its protective function, a covered bucket can also have a productivity benefit. With it, workers can kit, sequence, seal, and store needed items ahead of time. This helps make the most of time spent on the job site and can be significant when site access is limited, crane time is expensive, or work requires the interruption of critical services.

Finally, covering lift buckets keeps out prying eyes and reduces the temptation to “borrow” valuable items.

OTHER ADVANTAGES

Haul buckets need not be in motion to be of benefit. Secured to a scaffold or framework, a covered bucket keeps items accessible and in place, even when bumped by a worker and provide a much more effective solution than simply relying on toe boards. Additionally, buckets secured to the framework allow for the organization of parts, tools, and supplies at elevation and can act as a sort of “oversized tool belt.”

A cover also allows for the full use of a bucket’s volume, up to the rated weight capacity. Compared to an open bucket, a covered bucket reduces the chances of snagging the rim of the bucket on the way up.

EASE OF USE

Cover fasteners should be easy to secure and equally easy to open. Workers at elevation or in restricted spaces often have one hand occupied with simply holding on. Accordingly, whenever possible, covers should allow one-handed bucket access.

In addition, an opened cover should never become a “flying object” on its own. The cover should remain attached to the bucket when opened for access.

If the bucket cover is intended to do more than keep out rain or dust, it must also be tested and rated for its intended use. Workers can’t assume that it “looks closed.” It is critical to confirm that the contents will not spill out if the bucket is overturned. Sixty feet up in the air is not the place for, “I thought the lid was screwed on the jar!”

SUMMARY

Work often requires climbing up and down or crawling in, out, over, or under the work site. Good practice entails the use of a lift or haul bucket to keep climbing workers’ hands free. Best practice means the use of a covered bucket to keep important things in and foreign objects out. Anything important to take care of on the ground is even more important to secure when it is 300 feet in the air.

SUGGESTED APPLICATIONS

- Towers
- Wind turbines
- Utility work (above and below ground)
- Lineman
- Sign crews
- Structural steel
- Ironworkers
- Bridge workers
- Maritime workers
- Scaffold work
- Masonry
- Plasterers
- Carpentry
- Framing
- Roofing
- Interior maintenance work
- Heavy construction
- Arborists
- Fire and rescue