

Safety Director's Bulletin

S2009-4
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(One in a series of safety information bulletins from your Joint Insurance Fund)

MAGNETIC MAN HOLE COVER AND GRATE LIFTING

Magnetic manhole cover lifters save the backs of those who have to lift manhole covers and storm grates. However, recently, we have been hearing about people being injured while using these devices. Upon investigation, we have found that either people were not instructed in how to safely use the lifters or they didn't follow the manufacturer's instructions.

This bulletin is intended to remind you of basic safety rules, but is no substitute for reading or being trained in how to use these devices. That said, let's review:

Set up the site with the necessary cones or other traffic warning methods including, if needed, a flagger. Make sure you are wearing the proper safety vest, good gloves and safety boots. Set up your lifting position so that the wind is at your back. This will blow dust and sewer gasses away from you.



Clean off the top of the manhole cover, as it may be covered with a layer of dirt, debris and other material. You can use a heavy-duty broom if the debris is loose, or you may need a shovel if the debris has become compacted. Tap the cover with a maul to loosen it. If the cover is solid, you should monitor for flammable gasses around the edges or in pick holes before opening.

Check the manhole cover design to determine the proper method of removal. You need to make sure the weight of the cover matches the capacity of the lifting device. Remember that open grates mean less contact area for the magnet, so you should use judgment when considering the lifting capacity. You also need

to consider the surface you are working on. If you are on soft ground such as grass, your device should have larger wheels than would be necessary on concrete and chocking your wheels is recommended.

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Conner Strong Risk Control
September 1, 2009

Different cover and grate designs call for different hooks, magnets and shaft adjustments. Make sure you are using the right fastener for the job. Bear in mind that magnets do not work on covers that have asphalt over them. When attaching the magnet or hook, make sure it is centered. If it is not, the cover or grate will not be easy to control and you may lose it in the hole or injury yourself. If you are using two magnets or two hooks, make sure the chain is centered on the lifting head (as shown in the photo to the left. You can easily check this by counting the chain links on each side; the links should be the same number.

Make sure the handle is adjusted for your size and the weight of the cover you are lifting. Likewise, make sure the lifting head connected to the cover is properly adjusted. If the wheels of the device are touching the cover, the lifting head needs to be adjusted.

When lifting, slowly push the lifting handle down. Don't jerk it and don't put you full body weight on the handle; doing this may cause you to lose control of the load. Use your legs, not your back. To replace the cover, use the same technique.

WARNING!

Manufacturers recommend that if you wear a pace maker, do not operate a magnetic lifting attachment!

FINALLY

Remember the "15 Second Safety Rule." *Take 10 or 15 seconds and think before you act.* Ask yourself, "Am I abiding by the safety rules?" "Do I thoroughly understand how this device is to be safely used?" "Do I have the right people and equipment?" If that little voice in your head says "Look-out! You may get hurt doing this," stop and call someone to help you make the right decision.