

THE AUSLITE GANTRY IS HERE

THE NEXT STEP IN A "NO-LIFT INDUSTRY"



After months of trialing the prototype and receiving feedback from members in the industry, the next step in a "no-lift industry" for the cemetery sector – the Auslite Gantry has been unveiled and delivered to its first client – Boroondara Cemetery Trust (Kew Cemetery, Victoria).

There has been a growing awareness of the risks and responsibilities associated with the manual handling within cemeteries especially coffins and ledgers for some time now. These risks and responsibilities are growing as OH&S legislation becomes more onerous, coffins become larger and heavier and there is a greater propensity for litigation generally. Moreover, Cemetery Boards and

management recognise that they cannot *contract-out* their duty of care to funeral directors, families or other persons while they are performing tasks within the cemetery site. The challenge is that cemeteries have a diverse and challenging range of issues facing them from narrow pathways, restricting access, hilly uneven ground, varying height and width monuments and so on.

With the joint collaboration of Austeng and Lite Industries, a solution is now available and already in operation at Kew Cemetery.

The "Auslite Gantry" is the optimum and safe way to lower coffins into graves, especially when a monument has been erected and the coffin is required to be dipped during lowering. One of the many additional applications of the system is safely lifting and repositioning ledgers before and after interment, exhumation and attaching safety harnesses to staff when they are working in graves. The finalized version of the gantry has been demonstrated at the CCAV Conference in Echuca, CCANSW Conference in Wyong, and at the ACCA Mid-Year Seminar in Adelaide and has received an overwhelmingly positive reception.

Lite Industries have developed the gantry itself that is versatile enough to be individually adjusted for every application. The versatility, plus the ability to lower a large coffin means that any interment can be accommodated. Tony Geldart, Director from Lite Industries advises: "The way the gantry has been designed as a modular set up, it can be easily transported to site and erected quickly as well as meet all relevant National lifting codes and safety regulations".



Austeng has concentrated their efforts on the hoist system, being able to dip even larger and heavier coffins into monumental graves, with dual hoists powered by an onboard battery and operated with a remote control. Ross George, Director from Austeng says: "The system enables the lifting and tilting of coffins in a stable and controlled manner in order to facilitate interments in graves, particularly where there are some impediments such as large gravestones as appear in old monumental areas".

In practical terms, the use of the gantry means not only the elimination (as far as possible) of the risk of injury not only to funeral directors and cemetery staff and/or family members with the former group, on average, getting increasingly older. There is also the perception that the uniform and even process provided by the Auslite gantry is a more respectful way of carrying out an interment.

Andrew Taylor, Senior Engineer from Worksafe Victoria observes: "Occupational health & safety legislation requires that employers must, so far as is reasonably practicable, provide and maintain for employees of the employer a working environment that is safe and without risks to health. Employers may be asked to demonstrate why risk controls such as this system are / were not reasonably practicable in the circumstances".

There has been wide-spread acceptance and interest by the Funeral Directors at the demonstrations. Frank de Groot, President of CCAV comments; "Not only does the gantry system appear to work well, it is also a practical solution to a number of challenges facing both our members and funeral directors in this area".

Finally, the new system would also result in a decrease in the number of funeral directors that would need to be in attendance at a burial (from 3 or 4 - to 1 or 2?), thus resulting in a significant cost saving. There has been some suggestion that the purchase of the gantry by a cemetery organisation could be partially off-set by charging the funeral director a small fee (any proposed fees though, would of course need to be approved by the relevant State authorities administering the cemeteries).

The other possibility is that smaller neighboring cemeteries with low rates of burial could band together and buy one gantry between themselves and share the gantry across their sites in Victoria. This is also potentially something that can be funded at least in part by DHHS cemetery trust grants which are available and give preference to applications that address workplace health and safety issues. The final version of the Auslite gantry is aesthetically pleasing in the cemetery environment and can come in powder-coated or anodized finishes. The next stage is the development of an integrated canopy over the gantry to protect mourners from wind or rain.

The Management and Trust at Boroondara Cemetery Trust is to be congratulated for being the first to adopt a proven method of prevention and also their timely recognition of the potential for injury and the resultant adverse publicity that may result, especially in such a sensitive context.

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