Hot Topic

AUS Ltd Fibreglass Operating Rods Care and Maintenance

AUS Ltd has recently been dealing with a spate of reports of rod failures from the Utility Arboriculture industry. Possibly due to an increase in live maintenance cutting, the rods are getting heavier use than they have done previously. Whilst the rods are inherently strong and robust, their initial design was, and will remain to be, as an insulated tool designed for live working within the Electrical Supply Industry. The rod was adopted by the Utility Arboriculture sector within this industry primarily for its electrical insulation properties.

Upon further investigation of reports of failed rods we have established several common themes from various companies working in geographically distinct regions of the UK. Generally we have found both formal and pre-use inspection regimes are often lacking, or outside the scope of what would be recommended and there are large gaps in the knowledge of users with regards to inspections, safe use, storage and routine maintenance of rods.

It is important that all users (as well as those deemed competent to carry out more formal periodic inspections) of fibreglass rods should be able to identify potential issues with rods stemming from bruising, nicks and chips to the surface or ends of rods, elongated or worn button holes where rods join together, third party modifications (such as engraving or shortening) and contamination.

Particularly common points of failure can occur when excess wear builds up where rods join together, or the holes in which brass buttons locate elongate or develop radial cracks. The recommendation is there should be a maximum of 3mm of play

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between two joining rods. In excess of this, the rod should be withdrawn from service. Additionally, the strength of rods has been significantly reduced by third party engraving of spigots, leading ultimately to rods failing at this point.

As the manufacturer we are taking all reports of rod failures very seriously, and we are currently actively looking at increasing spigot lengths, new improved button designs, and introducing additional wraps of glass fibre material at point of manufacture to attempt to strengthen rods for the Utility Arboriculture industry.

AUS is working with the wider industry to ensure a better understanding of the use, care and maintenance of fibreglass rods. It has, for example, recently been identified that within the UA accredited units the recommendation is to clean rods with soap and water, which falls outside of manufacturer advice.

We also believe there is scope for additional training and instructional sessions (which have already been carried out with several companies throughout the UK) to develop awareness of safer rod use, inspection and care regimes.

Our Utility Arboriculture or Training teams will be happy to discuss this with individuals or companies in further detail, and assist with bespoke sessions as required.

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Pre Use Inspection - It is the responsibility of every user to inspect each component of the rod system prior to every use. All inspections should be visual and tactile to identify any defects such as surface damage, contamination, excessive wear, and overall condition of each of the operating rod sections.

Detailed Inspection – A detailed inspection is recommended generally at six month intervals by a formal inspector nominated as a fully Competent Person by the company owning the rods.

Interim Inspection - This should be carried out where the operating rods and equipment have been used in conditions that could cause significant deterioration, such as prolonged and repetitive pruning operations, that could cause abrasion or stress to the components. This should be done as the need arises by a formal Inspector in addition to a six monthly detailed inspection.

Setting Up – We recommend that no more than six rods are set up initially, using the walking up method as opposed to throwing up, to reduce stress on the rods. Extra height can then be gained by building on to the initial set up with additional rods being fed in from the bottom of the system.

Routine Maintenance – Rods are to be cleaned when dirty or contaminated with the specific recommended cleaning wipes which do not leave any residual contaminate. Once clean, the surface finish should be reapplied with an approved silicone impregnated duster – soapy water should not be used to clean rods.

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Transportation – A rod bag should always be used to transport rods. You should always consider weather conditions. Canvas bags are suitable for the majority of operations, with the option of vinyl bags for rods being used or transported on more arduous environmental conditions. Rods should be clean and dry before storage.

Reporting – Members of staff should always report any defects found with fibreglass rods immediately to a supervisor, and quarantine the defective components.

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