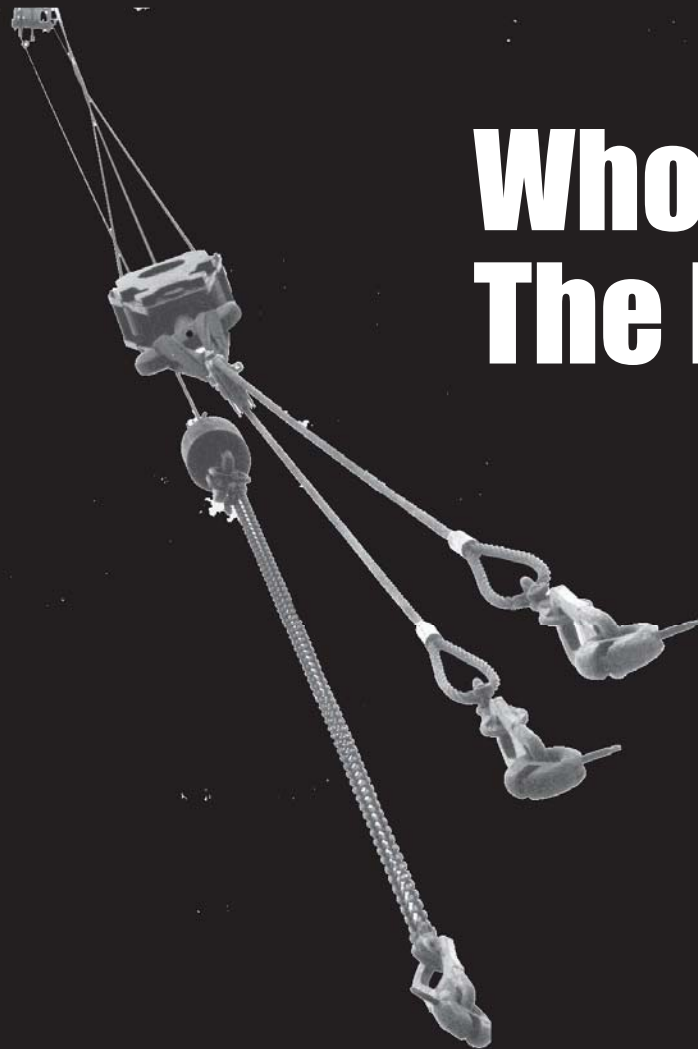


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Who's On The Hook?

Recent Incidents Around The Nation Underscore Importance Of Crane Safety

BY CARYN GIZNIK

In May 2007, a crane slammed into a Loop building, causing surrounding buildings to be evacuated, and several problems for public transportation.

This July, a Mason County man was killed at a construction site in Normal, IL after the boom of the crane collapsed onto the basket of the aerial lift.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics there were 72 crane-related fatal occupational

injuries in 2006, 61% were related to the contact with objects or equipment. This year there have been nine crane-related deaths in New York.

From urban to rural locations, crane safety is being dissected within the construction industry to ensure contractors and crane owners take the right precautions.

"The demand for power cranes has been so great that it's been harder for the owner to keep the equipment

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maintained,” said Ralph Pound of James McHugh Construction Company. “The second that crane is done on a job, somebody needs it somewhere else.”

“It’s slowing down a bit now, but there’s no doubt that one of the biggest concerns the last few years has been having enough time and enough people to do things the right way.”

Brian Sturtecky of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) explained that crane accidents are more likely than not caused by human errors such as rigging failure, knowing the proper weight a crane can hold and whether the rigger is qualified. Engineering News-Record reported that the tower crane snap in New York this May was caused by a faulty weld made in China. The New York Times reported in early September the New York crane-related accidents in March and May occurred during a jump or rising of the crane.

“Crane accidents occur because of an operator’s lack of inspections, and lack of crane maintenance,” said Sturtecky, who added that OSHA has up to six months to investigate an accident. He also points out that there are many factors for consideration and that whoever knew of the conditions that caused the accident is ultimately responsible.

Both general contractors and subcontractors are responsible when it comes to crane safety. Contractors are required to:

- Insure subcontractors
- Make sure the lift plan is in place
- Provide appropriate weights
- Ensure the crane has been inspected and is certified operated
- Make sure maintenance schedules are up-to-date

Technology has allowed for computer safety features on cranes, but human error tends to exceed what is possible, therefore causing accidents.

“A lack of proper maintenance and the rush to complete a job can also be factors,” Sturtecky explained.

The economic environment combined with recent accidents on cranes has made obtaining insurance a bit more expensive, as well.

“There’s a higher sensitivity now when it comes to insuring cranes,” Jim Naylor of Assurance Agency explained. Naylor advises general contractors to work with risk management personnel to guarantee subcontractors have the proper crane, liability and property coverage.

Another insurance professional, Scott Rasor of Zurich North America, tells general contractors that there is no such thing as “over-prepared” when it comes to cranes.

“Insurance companies will ask more questions and will request proof of crane maintenance along with operator certification,” Rasor said. “Crane product failure due to wear and tear and operator error are in play when it comes to assessing an accident.”

“Underwriters have a high interest in crane inspection and operator certification. The more prepared a general contractor is, the easier it’s going to go.”

Proper paperwork when leasing a crane or hiring a subcontractor should include:

- Maintenance and use logs on the crane that is being leased
- Vendor certification
- Inspection report
- Any recall information from crane manufacturers

Given the recent crane failures, purchase orders no longer offer enough protection for general contractors. A contract between the general contractor and subcontractor will offer a reasonable limit of liability.

“If general contractors do not own or maintain a crane, they should protect themselves appropriately,” said Rasor. “General contractors have to know the necessary precautions when leasing a crane or hiring a subcontractor.”

“A contract will provide more protection than a purchase order in the event of an accident. Work with your insurance company, as they are aware of everything you need to ensure a reasonable limit of liability.”

With more accidents occurring in major cities around the United States, New Mexico passed the Hoisting Operators Safety Act in 1995. The Act requires crane operators to hold a state license or pass a state-approved certification class.

Currently, in Illinois there is no crane operation certification program, but a crane operator working in Chicago must be licensed. According to the National Commission for the Certification of Crane Operators (NCCCO), 15 states and six cities require a test to become licensed.

In the city of Chicago operators must be licensed to operate a tower crane. Operators need to pass a written and practical exam after 2,000 hours as an operator in another jurisdiction or after an apprenticeship.

While there’s no silver bullet for crane safety problems, there are plenty of precautions that contractors can take to greatly reduce the risk of an accident.

“There’s an awful lot that the operator needs to be aware of, and if there’s a problem it needs to be addressed immediately,” Pound said. “Riggers need to be aware that many times, the operators are picking blind and can’t see the load. Communication is very important, either through signals or a squak box.

“There’s so much that goes into operating the crane itself. You have to be aware of that and make sure you’re careful.”

OSHA Proposes Changes To Crane, Derrick Rules

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has announced proposed rule changes for cranes and derricks, now available for comment after being published in the Federal Register.

OSHA is proposing rules that will further protect employees from accidents occurring with hoisting equipment. Under the proposed rule employers would:

- Determine whether the ground is sufficient enough to support the weight
- Be required to assess work zone hazards
- Ensure that the equipment is safe to operate through required inspections

A PDF of the proposed rules can be found on the safety section of the Builders Association’s website. Comments can be made electronically at www.regulations.gov (Federal Rulemaking Portal) or by fax to (202) 693-1648.