



Calling for Stricter Crane Inspector Restrictions

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The following article is in response to "Clear the Inspection Fog," from December 2009.

High-profile crane accidents and loose requirements on workers who use cranes have not only made the dangers of the crane industry obvious to the general public, but they also point out that our self-policing techniques do not work. It's like the fox guarding the hen house, and it consistently leads to tombstone regulations after a catastrophic accident.

Crane inspections in particular are a cause for concern. In California, Section 7375 CA Labor Code § (c) states that no individual may certify a crane in which the individual or his or her employer has a direct or indirect financial interest, nor may an individual certify equipment that belongs to his or her employer. An individual may not certify equipment or devices that he or she has manufactured or helped manufacture if the equipment is owned by his or her employer.

Once an inspector has looked at the crane, many crane owners believe that a sticker in the cab makes them compliant, and workers and the general public in the vicinity of the crane safe. However, the sticker only indicates the crane was inspected on a particular day. It does not imply that the crane meets the requirements to attain a Plate V from the Cal/OSHA crane division. In California, the certifying agency shall notify the division of any deficiencies found during the crane inspection, and a certificate shall not be issued until all deficiencies are corrected.

Federal OSHA's requirements differ when it comes to stickers, and from the outside, it looks as if the crane is safe. Additionally, the federal regulation for inspection, 29CFR

1926.550(a)(6), does not have a section similar to the 7375 CA Labor Code. Regulations need to be easy to understand, comply with, and enforced. Without a section like the 7375 CA Labor Code, my opinion is the OSHA regulation lacks substance and jeopardizes safety.

Make bulletins more accessible

Another issue of concern relating to inspections is withholding campaign bulletins from OSHA and crane surveyors. Bulletins are vital for the inspector to ensure continued compliance for cranes as they increase in age. In many cases, bulletins come up after the crane has been erected, posing a more substantial risk to repair and much higher cost to remove components that have already been installed. This could be easily rectified if manufacturers would make this information accessible to all involved in the crane's erection, maintenance, and inspection. More sets of eyes inspecting these cranes will reduce the likelihood of a potential problem being overlooked. Oversight is a good thing in this instance.

Experience needed

A final cause for concern is the inspectors themselves. Despite the influx of fast-track inspector programs, surveyors need to have experience. The inspector can pass the test for certification with no prior experience, which is extremely out of balance when compared to other industries.

I know that I have used this analogy before, but cosmetologists are required to have 1,600 hours of training to become qualified to take the licensing exam. This is to be able to wield a pair of scissors or color someone's hair. A bad day at the salon may produce a bad haircut, botched hair color, and maybe an angry customer, but not a life-threatening situation that a crane operator, rigger, or signal person

could produce by having a bad day working with a crane.

Another example is the airline industry. In an article in a recent Southwest Airlines's *Spirit* magazine, the company indicated that in order for a pilot to interview to become a Southwest Airlines first officer (co-pilot) who will one day upgrade to captain (pilot), he or she must already have a minimum of 2,500 flying hours total (1,500 hours turbine-powered total). Additionally, first officers must have a minimum of 1,000 hours in a turbine aircraft as the pilot in command. In layperson's terms, this means the pilot must already have 1,000 hours flying as the captain before he or she can interview to be a first officer for Southwest Airlines. Once a pilot makes it through the interview process, he or she must have an unrestricted U.S.-type rating on a Boeing 737 before beginning the six-week new hire training.

The last thing the crane industry needs is an influx of unlicensed, uninsured, or inexperienced inspectors applying stickers to cranes and fostering a false sense of security, which already is rampant. When a crane unexpectedly topples or collapses, the only winners are the lawyers and expert witnesses. I propose that crane inspectors have greater accreditation restrictions.

Cal/OSHA requires crane surveyors to have five years of experience on the particular cranes they would like to inspect; pass a written exam, an 87-question general knowledge test, a 70-question tower crane exam, and a 63-question mobile crane exam; carry a general liability insurance policy; and have a California-licensed professional engineer on staff or retainer.

After you see the aftermath of an accident involving fatalities firsthand, it forever changes the way that you view crane safety. I apologize for the firm tone, but without changing our ways, we can only expect more accidents. ■

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