

SC&RA faces critics head on

A SERIES OF HIGH PROFILE accidents has put unprecedented pressure on the crane industry in the USA. Members of crane trade group the Specialised Carriers & Riggers Association signalled their intention to meet the critics head on, and demonstrated the hard work that has gone into establishing sensible standards and regulations.

The day before the crane and rigging workshop started, Jason Ocharsky, head of New York City Department of Building's cranes and derricks unit sent out an email laying out how the unit would implement new city regulations on climbing operations.

Peter Juhren, national service manager for Liebherr tower crane distributor Morrow, said, "New York is increasingly becoming an unworkable market; rules and regulations are changing on a daily basis. They are finding every way they can to ensure documentation is in hand to make owners accountable if an accident happens, instead of focusing on proactively writing regulations and enforcing them to prevent accidents."

Frank Bardono, president and general manager of AmQuip, based in Pennsylvania, and Jim Robertson, managing partner of General Crane USA, based in Florida, addressed the current pressures on the industry. The two pointed out the

level of scrutiny facing the industry, and warning of the effect this was having on legislation. The crane industry, Bardono said, needed to proactively address criticism, explaining what it did to lift safely, and working with legislators on sensible regulation.

Robert Hileman, president of Maryland's United Crane and Rigging, and a member of the SC&RA tower crane task force, explained what his group had done to face these challenges, at a meeting of the SC&RA's governing committee. The tower crane task force, Hileman said, has decided on eight items local bodies should suggest when meeting legislators.

In Maryland, Hileman said, the industry responded to an accident near Annapolis. A task force was put together, which included contractors, the insurance industry, and the NCCCO, as well as unions such as the Operating Engineers and the Ironworkers. In 90 days, the group came up with a proposal that everyone could agree on. This included signalling and rigging, as well as crane operators. It also included a policy on drug use. This Maryland regulation, as well as new regulations in Philadelphia, was held up by a number of speakers as a model for how other regulations should be made.

Graham Brent addressed the governing committee on behalf of

the NCCCO. Brent said, "Enquiry levels, since May, have been off the chart. The NCCCO has received dozens upon dozens of calls from the press. The NCCCO has proactively met with the national media. Even though these events are tragic, they have helped to fulfil the NCCCO's mission on promoting safety and standards.

Brent said the NCCCO had completed seven certification programmes so far, with five more expected to be completed by the end of 2009.


Brent highlighted statistics, prepared by California division of occupational safety and health principal engineer Larry McCune, that found that, in the three years prior to California requiring certification, there were 10 fatal accidents and 30 injuries involving cranes where the operator would require certification. In the three years following the introduction of certification, only three fatal accidents and 13 injuries were recorded.

As well as regulations, the conference looked at other standards affecting the industry. Bill Smith, president of NBIS Claims and Risk Management, discussed new responsibilities in the crane industry, as laid out in the recent revision of the ASMI/ANSE standard B30.5. Smith explained that the original 1968 standard had been

incorporated into law by the federal government in the 1970 Occupational Safety and Health Act. As the act does not allow for 'backdoor lawmaking', new versions of the standard do not change law.

Smith said that the 1968 standard gave the crane operator authority to stop a lift if he felt it was unsafe, and made him responsible for everything under his direct control. Smith explained that the revision of the standard sought to define what is truly under the operators direct control and define his area of responsibility.

The new standard delineates clear responsibilities for everyone working on a crane lift, including the crane owner, crane user, crane operator, crane supervisor, and lift director. Most importantly, where many people thought the operator was responsible for everything it now clarifies many of the responsibilities that earlier versions of the standard had placed on the crane operator, and places them on other people.


So, the new version of the standard says that the site supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the area where the crane will be working is adequately prepared. In the same way, the lift director will be responsible for checking the weight of the load to be lifted, and communicating this to the crane operator. The idea is to ensure that the operator is only responsible for those parts of the job he has control of. 



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