

News conference addresses concerns over tower crane safety

Participants stress tower cranes history of safeness while questioning lack of government help

BY DANIELLE PERLIN, EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

(Editor's note: The following was derived from press releases sent to L&C.)

In the wake of multiple tower crane accidents within the last year, a news conference dedicated to concerns about the overall safety of tower cranes was held in Washington, D.C.

The Specialized Carriers & Rigging Association's executive vice president Joel Dandrea told the audience the main reason for the conference was to address concerns raised by the media and public about the safety of tower cranes.

Safety, he said, has remained a top

priority for his organization during the last 60 years.

"Any accident that occurs in our industry is of great concern to us," said Dandrea, "but the tragic loss of life is particularly troubling and completely unacceptable."

He noted how important of a role cranes play in our society, and how tower cranes are a "reliable technology" and have been used since the 1940s in construction projects.

"Of the more than 3,000 tower cranes in North America, about 2,100 are in use on any given day," said

Dandrea. "With a conservative estimate of 50 lifts daily per crane, more than 105,000 lifts are executed safely every day."

Standards needed

Bill Smith, president of NationsBuilders Insurance Services Claims and Risk Management Services (NBIS), once was a crane operator himself, as well as a training director, corporate safety manager and has held positions within the Dept. of Labor and OSHA.

"The largest percentage of crane accidents occur as a result of human factors and not as a result of any inherent flaw associated with the equipment or technology," he said.

Smith made note of the new technology and how it is imperative to stay current and properly utilize the safety features engineered into new equipment.

For Smith, crane operator certification and professional training would help the industry.

"When a professional risk management approach is applied, the potential for accidents is significantly reduced," he said. "This is especially the case when that risk management approach incorporates up-to-date

"[A] national uniformity of standards is essential and government must expedite the process."

**BILL SMITH, PRESIDENT
NATIONSBUILDERS INSURANCE SERVICES**



PHOTOS: PAT WALKER

training and education for crane operators, riggers, signalmen, contractors, subcontractors and others.

While many crane operators have become certified by the National Commission for the Certification of Crane Operators, such certification is not uniformly required nationwide. Some states and municipalities have their own requirements. Some don't have any requirements.

Further, not all contractors demand that their operators adhere to the certification standards developed by the NCCCO. This highlights even more the essential nature of professional training across the board.

Government dawdles

Dandrea noted that the SC&RA has always been a proponent for operator certification and unified standards. One association member was among the 23 appointed by OSHA to develop a proposal for the Cranes and Derricks Construction Standard, or C-DAC. That proposal ultimately went to the Dept. of Labor, where it has languished.

"In February of this year, SC&RA wrote to Labor Secretary Elaine Chao to express our concern about the lack of progress in adoption of the standard and the resulting disservice to our industry, to workers and the general public," said Dandrea.

Smith pointed out that the government, including OSHA, needs to help with the unification.

"As referenced in earlier remarks, OSHA has yet to act on our recommendation, though a number of positive steps have been taken," said Smith. "Just within the last 24 hours, we have learned that the draft standard has moved from OSHA to a peer review panel, then to the Office of Management & Budget where we believe it will be subject to review for 30 to 90 days."

Smith believes there needs to be a unifying standard throughout the

nation, stressing the importance of a government role and national unity in avoiding future safety hazards.

"It cannot be overemphasized that the time for action is now," Smith said. "Quite frankly, there are companies currently operating that either do not know or are confused about current standards. The larger companies strive to adhere to the latest knowledge and apply best practices and the kind of comprehensive risk management systems I have described. But national uniformity of standards is essential and government must expedite the process."

Training remains key

For Frank Bardono, chairman of the SC&RA Tower Crane Task Force, all the remarks made at the conference reflect the common theme that safety is and will remain at the heart of the individual companies and as an industry in general.

Bardono also said data shows the tower crane industry is among the safest types of construction equipment nationwide.

"A recent study conducted by the University of Tennessee and partially funded by OSHA indicated that during a recent seven-year period, just 4.1 percent of all crane related fatalities were attributed to tower crane incidents," he said.

Bardono concluded the conference by stating the company's true target: zero accidents and injuries.

Nick Yaksich, the vice president of Global Public Policy at the Association of Equipment Manufacturers (AEM), spoke about the integration of safety within programs and services AEM offers.

"Examples of such integration include the Safety Zone Exhibit at the recent CONEXPO-CON/AGG Exposition held in Las Vegas in March 2008; AEM's annual Product Safety Seminar; and our numerous technical

and safety committees that meet on a regular basis," said Yaksich. "In addition, AEM has formed alliances with OSHA and MSHA as part of an ongoing commitment to bring stakeholders together for open discussions on workplace safety practices."

He included AEM's three priorities in maintaining safety within the industry. One was to create

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VICE PRESIDENT
SPECIALIZED CARRIERS &
RIGGING ASSN.



relationships with the government so they may "provide technical, environmental and safety requirements pertaining to members' products."

Another was to develop and expand AEM safety materials and manuals distribution and be able to become an industry leader.

A third priority was to identify, participate in and communicate the developments of new standards, regulations and compliance requirements worldwide to help companies that market comparable equipment work together.

Smith summed it all up when he said that the organizations present agreed that while a renewed commitment to professional training at all levels of the construction industry was vital, equally important will be an enhanced effort on the part of government to update standards that can apply nationwide. **L&C**