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Dear Sir,

I have written a long letter about how unsafe the industry is supplying people through agencies who are not trained to the correct level for the job. It also comments on site managers that work unsafe to get the job done. If you do publish it I would appreciate remaining anonymous.

Have skills will work

I worked out a long time ago, that in construction there are two ways to make your way, knowing the right people or having the skills and experience to do the job correctly. I have worked my way up with the latter and having been on site in one role or another since I was 19 I consider myself a person able to understand most of the site rules and the way things really work on a site.

I have worked for several companies and have always worked to their rules and health and safety procedures, as well as to site specific ones. There is usually a protection working for a company. You do it their way and safely and they let you work and keep your job. This may not always be the case, but I was always under the impression - work safe and keep your job.

After 20 years in my field of work I then went for a complete career change and joined the crane industry. I self-funded myself and was really pleased that I changed my career, and enjoy going to work, even to this day.

I started on towers with the expectation that after a year I would be taken on full time by a company. The crash came and I struggled to find work, so I retrained in mobiles and crawlers. I also went and did my Appointed Person ticket. In doing this I was able to go from job to job through agencies driving different types of cranes. I worked my way from red to blue card and completed the NVO's that goes with them. I also worked as a site manager, and obtained a black CSCS site manager's card. All this was again self funded and following all correct rules and procedure for the governing bodies. If I could manage the timing and finances, when I was not working I would be training. I have also completed my NEBOSH construction certificate, within the past two years and have worked as a health and safety manager/advisor within the construction industry.

I have mostly worked through agencies with a few permanent jobs with a company, but due to circumstances they were never long term. When I was new to cranes I was put anywhere my CPC card skill allowed and was left to get on with it. This could be a tower crane driver, remote pedestrian driver, or a slinger. I was confident enough to do this, asking questions if I needed to about different types of loads and lifting tackle. I was mostly shown what is what by more experienced people. I have also been on sites where there was no one to show me the way the crane works, and provide familiarisation training. I was expected to just get on with the job, sometimes not even allowing time to have a few practices with the crane before the proper work started.

Remote pedestrian cranes are sold to sites as not needing a slinger/banksman. This creates a great deal of additional work for the crane operator. Also being in control of a load you cannot drive the crane. Driving the crane you cannot be in control of a load. I have had many a site manager tell me if I wasn't going to do it he would get someone else in. I have also requested assistance from someone to help me sling and

manoeuvre loads round site. This resulted in me getting the labourer who was also there to supply to the brick layers or the plasters etc. The result was complaints that I was taking their guys away from doing the job they were employed to do.

I have also been threatened on site by people for not lifting their material when they ask for it, and if I didn't put them at the front of the lift list "I would be sorted out". I have also been threatened by management a few times on site while working through agencies. This can range from, refusing to lift from underneath scaffolding to drag stuff out - loads that are well beyond my radius, working through my break so all are kept working, not signing up to a lift plan, because they wouldn't let me read it, and not signing a lift plan that they wrote and wanted me to sign it and put my name to it, without reading it first. This last one resulted in me taking away the lift plan and reading it in the cafe. The lift plan had several different cranes on the plan and several different load types - even though it was a timber construction with only one crane and the radius and weights were all wrong for all the crane charts. They also had no clear area for setup. I didn't go back.

Most of the agencies I worked for were more interested in keeping me on site until they could get someone there the next day to cover my work. They were not interested in the unsafe work practices, or their responsibility of providing safe competent people for the job who have been trained to use the equipment they are about to use. I have been on site where I have had to ask agencies to send someone else due to incompetent or lack of skills. I am always in favour for giving a new guy experience but sometimes you see people that just need more training. The agencies are making money from the person on site but are also employing that person. Shouldn't they then take time to ensure that the person doesn't just have the ticket for that category and a right to work in the UK, but also that they have the relevant skills to do the job to the correct safety standard? If anything does go wrong is the agency not as responsible as the operator and the site manager? If a site manager pushes people to do wrong, apart from saying "I didn't make them" - even though they did, should they not be aware of their duty of care to the operative and the health and safety of the site? The agencies I have worked for do provide to some of the very big construction companies and even though they may have health and safety policies and seem to be big on clamping down on bad practice, they are also ready to turn a blind eye.

This industry has taken a big knock in recent years. This has brought budgets right down and safety budgets are the last to be looked at. I have worked on a large site and I have been threatened by a large crane company crane supervisor for insisting that he take the load off the hook and not leave it overnight, or that he leave operatives with the crane.

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This in spite of the fact that it was his company's standard procedure, along with all the crane companies I have worked with. The company concerned was more interested and concerned that I might talk to other people about it, than in the safety of their operators. I have been asked to turn the key on the crane and go over radius or load on a number of occasions. I have also been asked to do illegal lifts, dragging loads, lifting loads wrongly and unsafely and also carry out a lift where no lift plans or plans in place.

I have also been a Health and Safety Manager for a construction company, after a few weeks I got asked by a director to fill in and sign record sheets for site visits. I refused to do this and I was told due to this I will lose my job. Two days later he told me to pack up and go. There does not seem to be enough protection in place against this sort of thing. I wasn't at the company long enough to claim unfair dismissal. They still work for a few councils and are themselves, but I lost my job for doing things correctly. The Industry needs to look at itself, and needs to ensure that an agency provides the correct people for the role. The management need to ensure the correct rules and regs are followed and not change them when it suits them, due to budget or time scale. And directors, agencies and

management should be held more responsible for what is going on within their company, or companies they provide to.

I have only mentioned the bad, but there are some good agencies, management and directors. Who do provide the correct service and care of the employee. It may cost a little bit more to employ someone with more skills, or find someone through an agency that spends more time to find the correct person. But this is worth it to prevent an accident where the cost could increase a great deal in fines and court costs.

As I said before, I do still enjoy my job and I am still working for agencies. I have lost a job before just because a new manager wanted to get his mate into my role. He shook my hand on meeting me on day one and said "please to meet you, I got a friend who does your type of work." I got looking for a new job from that day until I got laid off due to me not being able to do my job properly. I am in the same role as I write this with even bigger lifts and bigger cranes used.

I do not know the solution for this but hope something is done before a major accident happens that then dictates action.

Dear Sir,

Concerning the subject of training both myself and some other owners in the UK agree that we should be moving forward to self-regulation when it comes to operator training on larger booms, scissors and machines in general. Could you imagine what the roads would be like if the government had not at some point in time made it law that you must have a HGV licence to drive vehicles over 7.5 tonnes!?

In the UK we 'the access industry' are governed by the HSE who hide behind "you should carry out a risk assessment", rather than giving us laws to follow. This policy essentially puts the onus on us the employers to decide on our own training standards and then be held accountable in court should anything go wrong! This I would call passing the buck! Right now as a hirer I am relying upon my customer to have ensured that his staff have been adequately trained on the machines they hire from us. Does this truly make sense when I know there is a real risk of injury through an accident if the operator has not been trained and my customer does not have to provide proof of training to me!

Can you imagine a world where you could hire ANY vehicle and NOT prove that you have a licence to drive the category you wish to drive?

Obviously the HSE is not going to do anything about this, in which case maybe it is about time that we as an industry join together and agree a plan to introduce self-regulation on requiring proof of training on certain categories of machine. This would have been impossible a few years ago due to the lack of adequately trained operators and would have created all sorts of commercial backlash but I believe that now as aerial work platforms have at long last become a 'tool of the trade' this is the time for us to make it happen.

My idea would be for the major rental companies to hold a meeting, probably at the next IPAF UK council meeting in order to debate this subject and hopefully construct a plan to phase in proof of training and for those present to sign a pledge to make it happen.

Just an idea and please don't quote me on this!

Hope the sun is shining on you too!

The following letter was received in early May from a senior manager of a major UK access rental company.