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Readers Letters

C&a readers letters



Dear Leigh, Mediaeval Building Site

At Guedelon in Burgundy, during the course of a recent French holiday, this retired Crane Salesman had the great pleasure of witnessing a mediaeval crane in operation on a site where since 1998, a 13th century castle has been in the process of construction, utilizing building techniques and materials of the time. All the workmen are of course suitably attired in smocks of the period. There I saw quarrymen, stonecutters, basket makers, rope-makers, woodcutters, carpenters, blacksmiths, tillers and of most interest the two cranes, known as 'squirrel cages', one of which was in operation.

The name is clearly derived from the means of propulsion - a man on a treadmill inside a large wooden drum. Depictions of these machines were found on old manuscripts, and it took many months of research to complete the designs. In order to comply with modern safety regulations, a braking system was added, together with modern ropes and pulleys with known breaking strains.

I watched them lifting blocks of stone on a primitive pallet - the line speed was not very fast! The second crane at the top of the almost completed tower was not in operation at the time of my visit. Any of your readers who might be interested to know more about this fascinating project can visit the website at www.guedelon.fr

Your Sincerely

RJ Lloyd



The ground based crane at work



Guedelon Castle



The second crane at work





CRANES ARE NOT FAIRGROUND TOYS!

Dear Sir,

Health and safety is generally considered to be in the best interests of all of us and if one examines the position of most European Safety Authorities in any particular situation where health and safety of individuals needs to be considered, regulations are generally sensible and adequate for people of average intelligence.

Sadly, there is one glaring exception to that statement which makes a mockery of all the good work that has been done by so many people over the past four decades and believe it or not, it falls within the category of 'Falls from Height'.

I refer in particular to the use of cranes for what has become to be known as 'joy-riding', where persons are suspended either in a cage, a pagoda, a bird-like structure or even a "flying garden" and hoisted to extreme heights for some sort of a thrill, akin to that experienced in fairgrounds - the only difference being that in fairgrounds the apparatus used is a specifically designed piece of fairground equipment, whereas cranes were never designed to lift people. It seems strange that the use of cranes within the construction and related industries is so carefully controlled by European regulations, yet any fool wishing to promote his or her business, or ego, can use cranes as a means of entertainment in the lifting of people in the ways mentioned above and indeed, other even more absurd situations such as dining out on a platform suspended beneath a crane hook 100ft in the air.

A example of apparent total dis-interest and irresponsibility on the part of safety authorities was witnessed at this year's BAUMA exhibition in, of all countries, Germany, in the form of 'flights' from tower cranes. Even more recently, we hear of an accident involving a crane lifting 13 people in a pagoda type device, whose lives were only saved after the crane overturned, by the presence of a building which cushioned the landing of the boom, and by a miracle, the winch wire holding the pagoda and its 13 occupants did not break when it came to an abrupt stop. Even more miraculously, only two people were seriously injured, whilst the others only required medical treatment on site.

In recent times efforts have been made, by the European crane industry, to impose a formal ban on the use of cranes for lifting people but through lack of interest from the appropriate safety authorities in European countries, this well-intended move fell flat on its face. In the UK, we have the Health & Safety Executive, who have for many years made it quite clear that cranes and aerial work platforms should not be used under any circumstances for joy-riding. Yet, when an Irish gardener decided to suspend a complete garden from a crane at the Chelsea Flower Show two years ago, the chair lady of HSE was quite happy to fly in the face of all the recommendations supported by her predecessors since the 1970's and support her immediate subordinates who had satisfied themselves that "HSE was content that the local authority inspector had taken the necessary steps to satisfy himself that the appropriate and sensible precautions had been taken to allow the



13 survived this incident

Flying Garden to go ahead". Those were the words written to me by Judith Hackitt, CBE, the chair lady of the Health & Safety Executive on 9th June, 2011 during our lengthy correspondence over this issue.

As a matter of fact I had already spoken to the person appointed by Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council to have responsibility for Health and Safety at the Flower Show and he told me quite positively that he "knew absolutely nothing about crane safety rules" so I utterly fail to understand how HSE could express 'contentment' with that state of affairs!

That, admittedly, is just one example of the attitude of Health and Safety management in the UK which I don't believe for one minute is shared by its many responsible officers working to ensure health and safety is enforced. I do feel that the attitude, expressed by Judith Hackitt, typifies that of many safety authorities in Europe who seem too scared of the threat of criticism in the media to take action to prevent a serious accident, which is so clearly waiting to happen in one of these stupid situations where cranes are used to give a few members of the public a quick, cheap thrill.



BAUMA visitors flying from a tower crane hook

But for the grace of God, these two examples in Germany could well have cost the lives not only of those experiencing the joy-ride but of people on the ground who may have been underneath the crane when it tipped over or had objects dropped on their heads by those experiencing their thrill at BAUMA!

Surely, these examples alone prove the folly of allowing this practice to continue and the sooner European authorities 'bite the bullet' and introduce EC regulations to prohibit the use of cranes, in any form of fairground activity, the better, not only for the good of those who manufacture and use cranes but for members of the general public who may well become the victims of this folly if this stupidity is not 'reined in' once and for all.

If any of these dangerous escapades had taken place on a construction site during the lunch hour as an amusement for the workers, prosecutions would follow without a doubt. So why is it permissible elsewhere?

To Judith Hackitt and her opposite numbers in those countries where this folly is still permitted, I have to say "What are you going to say when the first death or serious injury occurs in your country as a result of your negligence?"

Paul Adorian

Dear Editor,

CPCS fear signalling errors with fixed cab-type cranes.

The CPCS and their lifting operations working group have stated that they fear inadvertent and incorrect signalling when slinging and signalling is under way utilising fixed cab-type cranes, such as the Iron Fairy. Additionally the CPCS worry that incorrect signals will disadvantage a candidate for testing, resulting in an appeal being made against a CPCS centre.

I think most sensibly minded professionals associated with lifting operations would agree that this decision by the CPCS is risk averse to the extreme, bordering on ridiculous. There are probably scores of Iron Fairy type cranes undertaking a plethora of standard and complex lifts, at pan sector sites across the UK, all complying with relevant legislation, working perfectly safely and competently, within their lift plans.

If the responsibility for directing the load is to be transferred to another person the slinger signaller should clearly indicate to the, (crane operator), that this responsibility is being transferred, and to whom. The slinger signaller should also clearly indicate to the, (nominated person), that this transfer is taking place. The, (crane operator), and the new, (nominated person), should clearly indicate that they accept the transfer of responsibility. These responsibilities are key in ensuring that any CPCS tester or signaller candidate is sufficiently versatile to cope with blind lifts with a fixed cab-type crane such as the Iron Fairy.

Why are leading stakeholders for operator training, such as the CPCS and it's management committee, taking it upon themselves to continuously dumn down vital duties such as described here for signallers, working with fixed cab-type cranes? In the current climate of commercialisation of training for the construction sector we have witnessed a steady erosion of quality training due to deregulation, or, as in this case, the fear of appeals or a court appearance. Skill fade encroaches the workplace at an ever increasing pace and we can do without those, based at Bircham Newton in Norfolk, who might find a particular crane/signalling discipline burdensome or awkward, and to which they perceive the possibility of being embroiled in litigation.

Give the signaller the responsibilities he/she deserves.

Mick Norton BEM MInstRE

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