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C&A comment



Zealots are not helping

Few in the lifting world would disagree with the notion that safety is far and away the most important aspect of what we do.

Yet there are still way too many accidents that could be prevented and at the recent crane safety conference Bryan Cronie of

Mammoet said: "Contractors are only interested in the cheapest price" and that "competitive tendering for work is the base of the evil".

Cranes & Access takes serious issue with this statement. No one wants an unsafe site because no contractor can afford the price of an accident. No matter how much is saved on a heavy lift contract or on the hire rates paid for equipment, it pales into utter insignificance compared with the cost of an accident.

We believe that elements within the safety industry are now guilty of slowing up improvements in site safety in the western world. There are many passionate and effective people involved in safety; and make no mistake about it, it is a big business these days. However, it seems that among them are a good number of misguided zealots who are influential way beyond their number.

Instead of encouraging the wider adoption of safe practices and working with contractors, rental companies and equipment manufacturers in a positive and practical way, the zealots seem driven by a mission to write new rules and catch people out. Rather like the policeman who hides in the bushes to catch a speeding car rather than making the road a safer place by slowing traffic at black spots.

Some examples?

- *Excessive paperwork: Cronie referred to two identical lifts, one in Canada with a 12-page method statement, while the one in the UK was 151 pages long. One was written for the zealots and rear-end cover, while the other, simpler one, was there to help ensure a safe lift.*
- *Impractical lengths for basic operator courses, five or six days, when two or three might be more than sufficient, so fewer people receive proper training.*
- *Slavish adoption of high-visibility "safety" measures such as fluorescent jackets and helmets, which can distract from higher risk issues.*
- *Misguided regulators who consume valuable committee time to push non-issues such as drop bar gates on aerial lifts, rather than tackling real issues such as harness wearing on boom lifts or removing overload devices on scissor lifts.*

The zealots not only fail to make the world a safer place, but they can bring safety rules into disrepute and create an unholy alliance of employees and employers against safety officers.

This is a subject way too big for this comment page, we will be covering this in more detail in future issues, please send us your views to "Stop the Zealots" c/o lws@vertikal.net

Leigh W Sparrow

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