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Letters



Re-invigorate the Forum!

Dear Leigh and associates,

I thought 'I doubt if I could fill your shoes, for your position and occupation differs greatly from my ilk'. Your responsibility demands the highest respect from all people in our industry. My courage of conviction, as spoken by Prince Charles in the early 1970s, has always been to be the best that I can be, respect those above me and satisfy those I work for. This letter of encouragement is positive all the way. The language conversion from English to German (he is referring to the different language versions of Vertikal.net - Ed) just does not fit all readers, especially the folks in the field who use hire and rent equipment.

I visit the Vertikal website several times a day. I am a slow reader and so to absorb useful knowledge, more so than to be appraised of events, occurrences and even changing times. Being an early riser I start each and every day in prayer, meditation and study. This routine helps line things up for the day and to be of meaningful service to customers and colleagues and keep my equipment in good working order.

I still have strong wishes for it to serve more participants than what shows in the chart. My premise remains that the Forum has great potential to serve and attract the brain power of or C&A industry. It seems to be like a beautiful speedboat tied up and in dock, with fuel clogging the carburetors. Those of us who repair and maintain our own engines know what's happening inside the engine.

My life with engines and mechanics took form in 1952 with model aeroplanes and model boats built from kits. In the fall of 1954 I signed up to play ninth grade football. Our quarterback was Al Unser, who later in life won four Indy 500 first place trophies. Many afternoons after school were spent hanging out at their race car garage when Al was racing open cab GMC six cylinder cars on a dirt track in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Through that affiliation I got hooked on learning how engines work, beginning with a four-cycle single piston reel-type lawn mower. I have acquired book skills and knowledge to keep my machines all running. I could not do what I do now had it not been for those seeds of curiosity planted and cultivated by others, including my father in law.

Over the years the writing team that serves the Vertikal Forum has attracted a few to post help for others. But like the classic story by Russell Herman Conwell written in Acres of Diamonds, the large diamond has yet to be discovered. It is right in your backyard and your team needs to mount the horse of reform and ride it to the finish line to reconstruct the Forum. This recommendation is to awaken your team to do a full makeover of the Forum. One of the best examples of a very active web forum can be found on www.arboristsite.com where we arborists all over the world are helping each other daily. I will admit there are a few blowhards and egotists who try and push the other writers around...we ignore and let them stew in their own inkwells. You might wonder why I wrote this letter by snail mail? It is because the website Contact us section is so difficult to scribe thoughts like this and then have it reach your desk. By the way kudos to Denis Ashworth for his book Going Up in the World.

Sincerely

Sherm Anderson

Best Tree Service
Mountain View Arkansas

We share Mr Anderson's frustrations with the take up of the Forum on vertikal.net and will certainly look at trying to invigorate and perhaps simplify its use? The original aim was to provide a space where people could debate issues, exchange ideas and provide help and support to others. The fact that the article comment function is often used for such debates is an indication that there is some demand for this. Any thoughts, ideas or input would be much appreciated. On the translation function there is no translation function on Vertikal.net - the German version is written in German by a German editorial team for the German speaking market. There is certainly an exchange of material - but no translation.

Editor

That wind adverse crane operator

Dear Leigh

I have been prompted to write a letter to the editor for the first time in my life as a result of reading this month's letters section in your esteemed publication. I wanted to agree with two of the contributors who raised the issue of the crane operator in Israel who had been fired for refusing to work in unsafe wind conditions. What I am surprised at is that you have not made more of this case and named and shamed the protagonists!

It is only by exposing this sort of action and mentality that we bring change and politicians sit up and take notice. I had always heard that unions in Israel were really strong based on the kibbutz origins? If that is so why did they not come to this lady's rescue? Was it because she was a woman? Or is it that they only look after members' interests?

Larry Gunnarsson

Concepción, Chile

We do agree with Mr Gunnarsson's comment, the story initially ran on Vertikal.net where we did highlight the operator's name and the employer. It was then picked up in the Highlights section of the magazine as a headline only, which is where the two readers referred to spotted it. The operator was Katy Karkolov, 27, of Ashkelon, who was operating a Potain MD tower crane for the contractor Machluf Behor and Sons. She apparently told her supervisor that the crane was swaying well beyond acceptable levels as the strong winds gusted higher. She then refused to continue and was let go. This in spite of Israeli government guidance re-issued earlier this year, that tower cranes should not be operated when there are winds liable to undermine the crane's stability, putting employees on or near it at risk. Only last month, Varda Edwards, head of the country's Occupational Safety and Health Administration said: "One may not operate a tower crane or put together, or dismantle a tower crane under strong wind conditions." In spite of this Israel's Forum for Prevention of Work Accidents claims that at least 10 workers have been threatened with dismissal in the first four months of this year alone if they refused to carry out high risk work in bad weather.

Reuven Ben Shimon, the Forum's founder, said: "The safety of crane workers is unsupervised and their rights are not protected when they complain of safety violations. The construction industry is not properly supervised and there is almost no enforcement. The workers, who are often employed through manpower companies, are afraid to identify themselves so they don't always report things."

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Safety is like Apple Pie

Good Afternoon Mr Wood,

Safety is like Apple Pie, everyone likes it, and I have yet to meet a single person worldwide who does not want to achieve Safety 24/7. So why does the record show that the frequency and severity of crane and/or lifting incidents worldwide is getting worse (not better) with 286 men, women and children killed by cranes and/or lifting ops since 2014. What is going wrong?

Crane operators are uniquely skilled, as they know that lifting operations are inherently dangerous, because they are always attempting to defeat gravity. With gravity always having the last word in the event of an unsafe act or omission, from which there is rarely a second chance to recover. So crane operators are highly skilled men and women who must take into account a myriad of factors like wind speeds, the sail area of loads and the mat sizes required to reduce the ground loadings through the outriggers. Are these the only factors? No there are hundreds of other factors to be considered, not least being the quality of the Banksman's signals and the rigging itself, which means that the Crane Operator is now dependant on two others persons for safety.

So is it right that the Crane Operator gets the Blame? NO the Crane Operator is simply one person in the Chain of Causation, starting with the CEO, because if he or she is Not committed to a culture of safety, then no-one else will be. So what can be done to stop this ongoing Death Toll of 286 Killed since the start of 2014?

The HSE Hierarchy of Controls is an excellent start point, with ERIC being the acronym suggested by HSE meaning Eliminate, Reduce, Isolate and Control all Hazards to ALARP (As Low a Risk as is Reasonably Practical). So as there are many legal, moral and practical objectives to be achieved, let's examine what these are. HSE say that Risk Assessment (In line with section 3(1) of The Management Regulations 1999) is the start point to identify all Obvious and Foreseeable Hazards, with the Method Statement putting in place the Control Measures needed to minimise all hazards to ALARP. Not the Tick Box exercise that I see all too frequently, but a suitable and sufficient Risk Assessment and Lift Plan in narrative form that takes account of all foreseeable hazards including the Worst Case Scenario (otherwise we are only kidding ourselves) based upon The LOLER Regs 1999 and British Standard 7121.

So if that's the correct procedure, what then is the

alternative? The alternative is that we do nothing with the possibility of killing yet another 286 men, women and children worldwide between now and 1st October 2018. So as you have asserted that construction safety is being managed correctly, let's take a real Dead example: - David S. Ford went to work on Friday 15th January and was knee deep in wet concrete when a loaded two cubic metre concrete skip was dropped onto him. David S. Ford was Dead On Arrival at the local hospital and left a wife and four daughters, who overnight were plunged into poverty and depression which lasted for 10 years. (The insurance company took 10 years to pay out £32,000 for this fatal incident)

So as you have the Brass Neck... the Brass Neck to assert that safety is being managed correctly, may I suggest that that you re-examine the facts. Because if you don't, then the courts now have the authority within The sentencing guidelines 2009 to impose multi-million pound fines and even custodial sentences, as some construction industry players have found to their cost recently. Moreover your false Indignation contributes nothing to safety?

Preston Crown Court should have the last word on this matter, where on Tuesday 22nd December 2015, the Honourable Judge said to the defendants "In offences of corporate manslaughter where the offence has been shown to cause death, the appropriate Fine will seldom be less than £500,000 and may be considerably more".

The Court then imposed a fine of £700,000 plus additional costs of £33,156 to the CPS and £66,844 to the HSE, making a total of £900,000.

Worker Safety is very important.

Kind Regards

Mike Ponsonby

The above letter which has many merits was sent as an open letter to a 'Mr Wood' in response to a comment on www.vertikal.net which said: "FINALLY!!!! people have seen this guy for what he is, hopefully Mike Idontknowwhatimtalkingabout Ponsonby will get the message and leave safety to the people who know what they are talking about."

Mike Ponsonby may rub some of the crane fraternity up the wrong way with his persistent efforts to raise awareness of lax crane safety among some contractors and crane hire companies. (If the same approach was taken to crane and lifting operations as is taken towards aviation the global tally of fatal incidents would plummet - without a doubt - as it is we are lucky there are so many near misses or the total would be far higher). While his tone and persistence can and does cause irritation there is no getting away from the fact that his intentions are sincere and well-intended, and his strident tone can be put down to the slow pace of real change, which is dramatically out paced by a persistent attitude of 'box ticking' and the 'turning of blind eyes'.