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Lorry loader cranes, inspection, testing and competence



With the number of lorry loader cranes operating in the UK increasing every year, the need for properly tested and inspected equipment has never been greater - not only for the safety of crane operators and site workers, but also for the well being of the nation's road users.

A crane that has not been properly maintained poses a risk not only in its place of operation, but also when travelling between jobs. But a great deal of confusion exists over the requirements for the testing of loader cranes. The Construction and Use (Lifting) Regulations 1961 covered this, but these were repealed in 1998 with the advent of the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations (LOLER).

LOLER introduced the requirement for an annual 'Thorough Examination and Inspection'. This made it the responsibility of a 'Competent Person' to determine if, and when, an overload test should be carried out on the grounds that "the design of certain lifting equipment is such that damage may be caused by conventional overload tests". Loader cranes do not fall into such a category.

But who is a 'Competent Person'? A 'Competent Person' is defined in the Approved Code of Practice for LOLER as having "such appropriate practical and theoretical knowledge and experience of the lifting equipment to be thoroughly examined as will enable them to detect defects or weaknesses and to assess their importance in relation to the safety and continued use of the lifting equipment".

"One of the major problems facing the lorry loader industry today is that the people carrying out annual inspections are not always 'competent', having limited knowledge and experience of the equipment, and sometimes not even being aware of the relevant standards," says Paul Duke, service manager for TH White Ltd, the Palfinger distributor for England and Wales.

So what does British Standard 7121, the "Code of Practice for the Safe Use of Cranes", have to say on the subject? BS 7121 is a most important source of advice, witnessed by the fact that it is referred to eight times in the LOLER Approved Code of Practice and Guidance. Every competent loader crane examiner should be aware of BS 7121 Part 2: "Inspection, Testing and Examination" and Part 4: "Lorry Loaders", and if they are not, they are not "competent" as defined in the Regulations.

It is acknowledged that the British Standard 7121 is a recommendation, and not a legal requirement. However, in the event of a prosecution following an accident, the competent person would probably be questioned as to whether the requirements of BS 7121 parts 2 and 4 were applied during the 'Thorough Examination and Inspection' and, if not, what alternative standards were applied. The failure of a competent person to satisfy the court that an acceptable alternative standard had been used could result in that person being recorded as "incompetent".

BS7121 Parts 2 and 4 recommend

a 25 per cent overload test to be carried out:

- **Before first being taken into use.**
- **Every four years after first being taken into use.**
- **Every eight years after first being taken into use. The test should also include a Non Destructive Test.**
- **After each major repair or component change.**
- **When a change of chassis takes place.**

BS 7121 parts 2 and 4 also recommend that a proof load test, plus 10 per cent, at maximum radius be applied as part of the annual 'Thorough Examination and Inspection'. This is necessary for calibration checks of the Overload Protection System and the Rated Capacity Indicator to be verified.

ALLMI totally endorses the recommendations of BS 7121 Parts 2 and 4 (ALLMI was party to the preparation) to be incorporated in the annual 'Thorough Examination and Inspection' as required by LOLER.

If you require further clarification on this issue then please call ALLMI Training Ltd on 01249 659150

For the record

It should be noted that BS 7121 Part 4 was published in 1997, shortly before the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) (Amendment) Regulations 1997 ("Bridge Bashing") came into force on 1 October, 1997. As a consequence there is no mention in BS 7121 Part 4 of the requirements to check for conformity with these Bridge Bashing Regulations during the annual 'Thorough Examination and Inspection'.

BS 7121 Part 2 was first issued in 1991 and revised in 2003. The 2003 edition requires that the Examiner checks that there is a label in the truck cab, visible from the operator's seat, giving the normal travelling height of the vehicle. BS 7121 Part 2 also requires a functional check of the height warning device. This is an example of why BS 7121 Parts 2 and 4 should be used in conjunction with each other and should not be used as individual "stand alone" standards.

Below: A sample of the ALLMI Training Operator Card, bearing the Health & Safety Executive's 'Working in Partnership' logo; the only UK lorry loader operator card displaying this symbol.

Card details include the operator's identity number, the expiry date of the card and the ALLMI category for which the operator is certified. The ALLMI category system is based on the rated capacity of the lorry loader and also the attachment that the operator is trained to use.

