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HSE DOCUMENTS are very dry. The authors do not exaggerate and colourful language is very rare. This dry language makes the HSE's "Discussion paper on the safe use of 'external' climbing frames on tower cranes" compelling reading. Without any attempt at sensationalism the authors have produced a disturbing catalogue of potential risks and actual accidents involving climbing frames on tower cranes. The understated language used in the paper makes for chilling reading.

Some of the paper's recommendations are complex, reasoned arguments that will be welcomed by all responsible tower crane manufacturers and shed new light on what can potentially go wrong.

Others seem so obvious that one must ask why it is at all necessary to make the recommendation. Reading between the lines, the team must have been shocked by what they found in the field. Two examples that shocked me were repeated calls for adequate railings and walkways on climbing frames and the remark that current interlock devices used to stop the crane slewing during climbing operations are "easily damaged and can be bypassed by hard wiring the hydraulic cylinder motor into the crane's electrical supply."

The inference must be that the team found examples of this.

Climbing tower cranes does not have to be dangerous and the paper notes that when the Canary Wharf tragedy happened on 21st May 2000, "this was only the second collapse of a tower crane during climbing anywhere in the world". The first was in San Francisco on 28th November, 1989.

However, there were at least three serious accidents the following year and the HSE believes that the use of climbing frames is increasing rapidly.

The Discussion Paper is a sober and realistic attempt to bring the best possible practice to all operators and manufacturers of tower cranes. Its recommendations will not be universally accepted, but many will. Everybody involved in the design, construction or use of tower cranes anywhere in the world should get a copy of this Discussion Paper and read it. You owe it to yourself and your colleagues.

Tim Whiteman

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NB The HSE's "Discussion paper on the safe use of 'external' climbing frames on tower cranes" is available free from the HSE web site or via the News Section of www.Vertikal.net

Letters, emails & faxes and phone calls are welcome and should be sent to :

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