

A lively affair

This year's CPA Crane Interest Group open meeting was a lively affair with many of the 60 or so attendees animatedly stating their opinions. Held at the Nuthurst Grange Hotel, Hockley Heath in Warwickshire, the meeting dealt with several 'hot' issues that divided the delegates.

Speakers included Tim Watson, Ian Simpson, Colin Wood, Kevin Minton, Wayne Crumpton, Mark Francis and Peter Brown and all were kept on their toes with some lively banter/ heckling from the interested/ concerned audience. Here is a flavour of the mood and subjects discussed.

Thorough examination

First up was Tim Watson on 'The thorough examination and testing of mobile cranes'. Under the Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER) it requires a 'thorough examination' of equipment every 12 months - six months if lifting people - by a competent person. However the practice of the four yearly, 125 percent load test, a requirement before LOLER, is still commonplace and generally expected which caused for concern among many attendees.

Watson outlined the arguments in favour which included: Clients requiring it for a sense of comfort; the time out of service provides the opportunity for a thorough service and it is particularly useful when buying a secondhand crane as many buyers believe that it shows the unit is structurally sound.

There are also a number of negatives: Some crane manufacturers (such as Liebherr) do not recommend overload tests and inspection bodies and insurers are not in favour as repeated overload tests may lead to fatigue and therefore have an influence or cause an accident.

One attendee made a comment regarding a crane that failed during the four year overload test and that the insurance company was trying to get out of covering the cost of repair. In a show of hands, all of those attending the meeting still carried out the four year overload test.

Watson outlined a possible way forward which was to introduce a CPA Best Practice Guide (BPG) on Maintenance, Inspection and Thorough examination which would hopefully be endorsed by various bodies including the HSE, SAFED, Construction Confederation, MCG and manufacturers. He also added that BS 7121-2 is scheduled for revision and is likely to reflect the BPG.

One major, national crane rental company has already developed a detailed and rigorous examination scheme which was shown to



Should cranes be subjected to the 125 percent load test? That was one of the discussions at the CPA meeting.

everyone at the meeting. It included independent examination, model specific information to enable accurate categorisation of nominal load spectrum, data logging to record and analyse lift events, annual non destructive testing, oil sample analysis of all major components, manufacturers specific data on crucial load/stress areas to be examined, ASLI calibrated with certified load, cranes maintained in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations and owner's procedures, 12 monthly brake examination with component dismantling, independent six monthly tyre audit and cranes speed limited.

The general view of those attending was that many companies - particularly those not at the meeting (of course) - would not bother trying to follow such thorough procedures and improve the maintenance and examination of their cranes giving a further financial disadvantage to those who did.

"People not complying would get caught," said Bill Frost. "No-one (the HSE) ever visits our sites, so how will they catch those who don't comply with it," retorted Bob Francis.

BS7121 Part 4 (Loader cranes)

Ian Simpson of the HSE outlined the various updates to BS7121 with each of the five parts revised on a rolling cycle. Next to be updated is Part 4 (Lorry Loaders) which was last reviewed in 1997. Simpson said that there had been so much development in this sector over the past 11 years that it needed to be reflected in the update and revision - the current Part 4 does not even mention LOLER or PUWER. It was also thought that it should be more risk based and not a 'one size fits all'. "You would expect to do more paperwork for a complicated lift than an easy lift but guidance at the moment says the same amount for both," said Simpson. "In reality, companies carrying out hires cut corners with paperwork whereas with contract lifts, the paperwork is generally good."



Ian Simpson

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An interested CPA audience

He added that the larger lorry loaders were now competing for work with mobile cranes and that therefore there needed to be a level playing field being risk based for both. Factors such as load and environment needed to be taken into consideration and he outlined three areas in the new proposed revision - Basic Lift, Standard Lift and Complex Lift.

"The Basic Lift is an operation where the weight of the load is known and there are no hazards within the area of operation," said Simpson. "The Standard Lift is where there are significant hazards either in the working area or the lorry loader or access route. And the Complex Lift is where the loader is handling complex loads or lifting and then placing a load."

A loader crane would fall into the mobile crane territory when carrying out Standard and Complex Lifts.

"For example, unloading roof trusses from a lorry would be a Basic lift however placing them at a high level which has additional hazards would be a Complex Lift. Another example might be delivering temporary buildings - which might range from a Basic lift to a Complex lift if double stacking and stairs etc are included."

The update and revision began in January this year with input from the HSE, CPA and ALLMI. By the end of this year the document will hopefully be ready to pass to the BSI working group which will have a new draft by May 2009 with publication by November 2009.

There were several comments from the audience regarding 'cowboy loader crane operators' carrying out work without the required paperwork.

Calls for more Health and Safety inspectors on the ground were dismissed with Ian Simpson saying the HSE had no intention of increasing the numbers of inspectors.

Hire desk training

Perhaps the most debated point was during Wayne Crumpton's presentation on the 'CPA Best Practice Guide for Crane Hire and Contract lifting, Hire desk training and Crane user's responsibilities'. A principal inspector of the HSE, Crumpton had put on a different hat when helping crane operators in the North West get together to discuss issues driven by several high profile accidents in the area over the last few years.

Last November the HSE invited about 40 companies to its Bootle headquarters to discuss a wide variety of issues particularly affecting the companies operating at the 'sharp end'. The HSE was looking for clarity in what it was reasonable to expect company owners to do when renting out cranes on a simple hire, and it was concerned about the lack of a consistent approach.

Crumpton said that the meeting was very interesting but it was clear that many people were not clear on their legal duties. So a working group of eight crane hire companies and the HSE got together and the main points that came out of it was that hire desk staff need more training and that when hiring out a crane, proof of competence should be given (a fax of relevant documentation) by the Appointed Person on site. While many agreed in principal, several thought that proving competence (experience) might be tricky without formal

qualifications and certificates. It was also pointed out that the CPA's Best Practice Guide of six years ago already recommends doing this, so this was nothing new. Asking for proof of the AP's competence should be a national request not just in the North West.

The HSE's view on this was that in the event of an accident, it would be looking at the company systems and the general way the company operated. After some heated discussion, Ainscough's Neil Partridge said he thought it should be down to the hirer to decide and therefore down to the experience of the hire desk controller.

High profile sites

The CPA's Kevin Minton gave an update on the Greater London Authority's BPG on the control of dust and emissions, stating that hirers were still not being asked or required to have diesel particulate filters fitted when working on the Capital's high profile sites. He said that the CPA would continue to argue that cost and technical issues made the fitting of these filters on cranes impractical.

Bob Francis suggested that the industry as a whole should say NO to the filters and that all the hirers should stand as one against it. Ainscough's Partridge thought the opposite - "fit them and work or don't fit them and don't work." In a show of hands, just two companies openly indicated that they were working on installing particulate filters.

Working time directive

Colin Wood outlined the proposed revision to the Working Time Directive which reduces the average number of hours worked by an operator from 78 hours each week to 60 hours. Currently going through the European Parliament, it may be passed by 2010.

CPCS

Finally Peter Brown from Construction Skills gave an update on the CPCS scheme but felt the full force of the crane hire companies in the room when it became clear that it was no longer necessary to prove you could erect a fly jib to qualify. Comments such as 'The fly jib is the biggest killer in the industry and that more than 90 percent of cranes are supplied with jibs or extensions' and that it should be a crucial part of the test' were made. Brown



Kevin Minton



Bill Frost



Colin Wood

stated that the jib test had been removed after consulting the industry "not us" went the cry from the floor, but would consult again to see if it needs reinstating.



Peter Brown