

Lifting up the LEEA

Q. What is the LEEA?

A. The Lifting Equipment Engineers Association aims to give its members technical advice and support and authoritative representation. It was set up 50 years ago by a group of business men who genuinely wanted technical standards improved but were not looking for business or financial gain. It particularly promotes safe practice, and hopes to be recognised as the industry's champion for safety and legislative issues.

Q. What's your background?

A. In 1985 I joined a subsidiary of LGH (Lifting Gear Hire). I was then promoted to the board of LGH in 1990 and five years after that started my current position as the Operations Director for the UK.

Q. You will be the Chairman of the LEEA for two years. What do you hope to achieve in that time?

A. My own real concerns and experiences of the industry from working within LGH will hopefully help me to promote the LEEA's goals. LGH, and other companies associated with the LEEA with the same ethic, are much more expensive than other hire companies. But it is getting harder and harder for those quality driven companies to fight the tide of the cheap priced hire that is out there. As prices are reduced, service, equipment quality and safety are all compromised. As Operations Manager of LGH I could try to influence the market place but, as the Chairman of the LEEA, I should be able to exercise far more impact.

"I would like to see the LEEA stamp mean as much to this industry as ABTA or ATOL endorsement does to the travel industry."



Rosie Gordon finds out how newly elected chairman

Paul Fulcher plans to make the LEEA the lifting industry's voice.



Paul Fulcher

Q. Will the industry be hearing from the LEEA more often?

A. The LEEA has an immense wealth of technical expertise. Anyone can

phone up for free advice on almost any type of lifting equipment. But what has been neglected is marketing. The LEEA has been far too inward-looking. We need to address this, publicising problem areas through the use of trade press in particular. The Association has started to work much more closely with the HSE of late and we hope to raise our profile and flush out bad or dangerous practices through this partnership.

Q. How do you think the industry perceives the LEEA and its aims?

A. Take the example of the MCG (Major Contractors Group). This is a consortium which has been told by the government that it must clean up its act, to cut down on the number of accidents. All the members will be fully trained and the MCG will insist that all workers and suppliers are competent. But the MCG doesn't recognise the LEEA. We have strong links with some groups, like the HSE, but the people actually working in the construction industry are not taking us seriously. They need to be made aware that no other trade association can provide what we can for our members.

As soon as the Association is taken more seriously by the lifting gear industry it can raise standards.

"Because it is not compulsory to join us, many companies cannot see the value in joining. But we do have the power to change things – for example, LEEA had a big influence on how the final LOLER document appeared." ■

Bodgers beware

When a concrete block being handled with an electric hoist slipped from its sling and fell on the worker below, the result was an extremely serious and permanent injury. The accident occurred during one of a series of repetitive lifts and demonstrates failures not just in the 'mechanics' of the lifting operation but, more significantly, in overall planning and supervision.



Effective planning and supervision are absolutely crucial to safe lifting, which is emphasised in the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations of 1998 (LOLER). The job was on a construction site so, as well as the duties LOLER imposes on the employer, overall responsibility for safety on the site lay with the main contractors. Crucially, the fact that a dangerous lift took place without their authorisation (as site policy dictated) indicates that they failed in their duty to keep up effective supervision on site. Had they done so, the 'warning signs' displayed by this lifting operation would have been identified and addressed.

These included the fact that it was a series of lifts involving repeatedly lifting a heavy load directly over a man's head. Obviously, wherever possible, this should be avoided. However, if it is unavoidable (as it was claimed in this case) then the much higher degree of risk involved should be reflected in the methods used to execute the lift.

Those responsible for planning and authorising the lifting operation should have considered carefully the methods of attaching the concrete load to the lifting machine, taking account of the need to manipulate the load into position and land it without trapping the equipment. The use of a special-purpose lifting attachment

A serious incident that recently came to the attention of the Lifting Equipment Engineers Association (LEEA) could easily have been prevented.

Derrick Bailes advises

could easily have been justified. Using equipment that consistently holds the load in the correct position not only minimises the risks, but is also likely to cut the time taken to complete the operation. As it was, the lifting operations were performed using general-purpose equipment.

In terms of the detail of the lift itself, this failure to identify both the relatively high risk inherent in the operation and the potential need for special equipment was reflected in the ad hoc modification (bodge) of an inappropriate sling in an attempt to make it 'fit' the load in question. Cannibalising lifting equipment on site is one of the most common characteristics of dangerous lifts. In this case, the sling was attached to the load at each end and run over the seat of the hook. This arrangement should never be used as it is inherently unstable and always

likely to slip. The sling had been knotted each side of the hook in an attempt to stabilise it, but the load fell when the sling slipped and the knot, far from stabilising the load, caused the sling to be displaced from the hook.

As with the vast majority of lifting accidents, closer study of this particular incident demonstrates how easily injury could have been prevented. The objective of good lifting practice is to ensure that the load is safe and, when lifted, as secure in the air as it was on the

ground. Achieving this demands assessment of the load, including a determination of its weight and centre of gravity in relation to the lifting pick-up points. Also, what route will the load take and, critically, who will be put at risk? Numerous factors will influence the choice of sling or other load lifting attachment, but the load must be balanced, never violently or unintentionally change in attitude when lifted and must remain stable at all stages of the lift.

With training and supervision, identifying the right approach to lifting is relatively straightforward. Legal compliance is naturally a good starting point and LOLER stresses the importance of planning, training and supervision.

Practical help is often required to implement the Regulations, which is available in the LEEA's own Code of Practice for the Safe Use of Lifting Equipment. Much of the guidance provided represents nothing more than straightforward common sense; unfortunately this particular case, and many equally tragic accidents every year provide graphic evidence that the 'obvious' is too often overlooked. ■

● For advice on lifting practices and regulations, contact the LEEA on 01279 816504