



Shouldn't we recognize the truth about crane safety today (as compared to media misinformation that consistently embellishes the facts)? **Kevin Cunningham** discusses how much safer the industry has become

The *real*

the State of California adopted the Crane Operator Certification program with the National Commission for the Certification of Crane Operators (NCCCO).

Serious reduction

According to Larry McCure, principal engineer at DOSH, "You can see there's a serious reduction" in incidents after the certification took effect, and even though statistics may not tell the whole story... McCure said, "This certainly is a positive trend."

In California from 2004 through 2007, NCCCO certified over 8,900 crane operators and as of the end of 2009, NCCCO-certified crane operators grew to over 10,000 certified operators.

As you can see by the Cause and Effect chart, there has been a dramatic reduction in crane incidents since the state of California adopted the NCCCO crane operators certification program.

Certainly, the national statistics from the US Department of Labor showing significant improvement in crane safety, and the statistics from Cal-OSHA showing how our largest state (California) has made even more dramatic improvement in crane safety, proves that in fact, the crane industry has made extraordinary progress to enhance and improve safe working conditions in crane and rigging operations over the past several years.

And what is equally extraordinary in this regard is the fact that the overall construction industry experienced explosive growth across the entire country in the same relative periods (1995-2008), creating further evidence that the crane industry has gone above and beyond other industry sectors relating to commitment and follow-through in the goal to create

safer crane and rigging operations.

So one would wonder, why is the media today consistently attacking our crane industry with over embellishments of the random crane related incidents? Is it because they crave better ratings? Or is it because in today's sluggish economy they don't have anything better to report on?

Perception is not reality

Regardless of the motivations of certain media centers (both print and television), they are wrong. And the facts and statistics prove they are wrong. But in today's media centric environment with 24/7 streaming news and hand-held technology, perception can become reality with city, state and federal regulators. And this is becoming a dangerous dynamic in today's fragile economic climate.

The danger emanates from government bureaucrats trying to make a name for themselves and in the process creating additional burdens on certain business segments that are already burdened by poor economic conditions and overly restrictive regulations that prohibit business sustainability.

So even though the danger of over burdensome bureaucracy exists, and certain media-whores go way beyond the statistical facts for their own benefit, two things are certain to this writer, who is privileged to have made the crane industry my life's work over the past 15 years... and those certainties are that the crane industry is comprised of men and women of the highest character and resolve to overcome any challenges - and by staying unified as a very important part of the U.S. economy today, the crane industry will overcome this adversity.

Too much embellishment

And, while the government bureaucrats and media (misinformation) mongers continue to attempt to embellish on the facts for their own selfish gain, organizations like the National Commission for Certification of Crane Operators (NCCCO), Specialized Carriers and Rigging Association (SC&RA), NationsBuilders Insurance Services (NBIS), and a host of individual crane and rigging companies will continue to strive for excellence in the consistent

According to the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, annual crane-related fatal injuries have been reduced over 25 percent on a national basis over the 10-year period between 1997 and 2006. (Refer to the table.)

Additionally, crane-related fatalities and injuries in California have declined sharply after more than four years of training and testing that produced in excess of 10,000 certified operators in the state, according to the Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH).

According to the Cal-OSHA Reporter, in a three year window between June 1, 2005 and May 31, 2008, crane-related fatalities dropped to a total of two from 10 over the previous three year period of June 1, 2002 to May 31, 2005. And crane related injury incidents dropped by over 56 percent in the same relative periods.

This 80 percent reduction in crane-related fatalities is attributable to two major factors in this writer's opinion. First, the crane industry recognized the need over the past 15 years to take a more progressive approach to crane safety as an entire industry group.

Secondarily (and very significantly),

Crane-related fatal occupational injuries* 1997-2006

1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
97	93	80	90	72	80	62	87	85	72

*Including fatalities where the source of injury was a crane, where the secondary source of injury was a crane, or where the worker activity was operating a crane.

SOURCE: US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, in cooperation with State, New York City, District of Columbia, and Federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries.

facts

Cause and Effect?

Crane Incidents before and after operator certification

June 1, 2002 – May 31, 2005 Fatal Incidents Injury Cases

High Voltage Contact	5	7
Stuck by Loads	4	18
Mobile Crane Overturned	1	5
Total Cases	10	30

June 1, 2005 – May 31, 2008 Fatal Incidents Injury Cases

	Fatal Incidents	Injury Cases
High Voltage Contact	1	4
Stuck by Loads	0	3
Mobile Crane Overturned	1	6
Total Cases	2	13

SOURCE: Cal-OSHA Reporter 2008

achievement of improving safety.

In closing, it has been my experience that in addition to the organizations previously mentioned, there are literally thousands of crane owners, who are true

industry leaders that deserve credit for the significant improvements made in crane safety over the past decade and a half.

Two of these industry leaders are George Bragg (who recently passed away) from

Bragg Crane Service in Long Beach, CA and Jimmy Lomma from New York Crane and Equipment. These two stalwarts in the crane industry not only operated at opposite ends of the country but were very different personalities, as well.

And regardless of their personal and geographic differences these two crane industry giants were so committed to improving crane safety that both were instrumental in the formation of NCCCO, which has contributed tremendously to crane safety. They each share the distinctions of being the largest crane operations in each respective geographic region (East/West), and they both held past president/chairman roles of the SC&RA. But most importantly, they have established two of the statistically safest crane operations in the entire country.

So with industry leaders like Bragg and Lomma, and thousands more like them, combined with NCCCO and SC&RA industry organizations staying steadfast to the commitment of achieving excellence in safety in crane and rigging operations, we are fortunate to be in a position today...to recognize the truth about crane safety. ■