

Training to the Test Doesn't Help Safety.

About four years ago, OSHA implemented laws that require crane operators to be trained, certified, and evaluated.

Those laws intend to make crane operation safer for everyone who works in and around cranes by assuring that the people who operate cranes know what they're doing and how to do it safely.

Considering the potential dangers of crane operation, particularly mobile cranes, we need to make sure operators are as well trained as possible.

Long before the initial crane rule took effect in 2010, OSHA had a general law mandating training for equipment operators. It said that employers must only allow employees qualified by training or experience to operate equipment. There were no other specific requirements.

When the new rule took effect on Dec. 10, 2018, OSHA upped the ante by requiring specific technical knowledge to be covered in training. For in-depth information about the training law, see "OSHA Takes Training to a Higher Level" in *Crane Hot Line*, June 2019.

The Problem: Operator Certification

The 2018 OSHA law about operator training is beneficial. OSHA thought it out well with help from industry experts. If followed, it would help crane safety.

But to a large degree, the training law has not been followed. Most people don't even know it exists. But, by far, the biggest problem is operator certification.

Most employers think that certifying an operator is all they need to do, and that a certification card proves a crane operator is qualified. Combine that with today's strong demand for certified crane operators, and you can quickly see that it's all about operators becoming certified.

Effect on Training

Here's how operator-certification

requirement affects training.

First, operators must have some training to have a shot at passing certification exams, particularly written exams.

Second, the money to be made from training and testing operators has drawn a lot of people into the training business, creating a lot of competition.

Third, certifying a crane operator is expensive for an employer. The costs include paying the operator and the trainer; the operator's time away from the job; loss of production because cranes are shut down; and the cost of conducting a practical (skill) exam on a crane.

One way for trainers to land business is reducing the training time (and, therefore, cost) for an operator to pass the required written tests.

To get more business, some trainers claim to prepare operators for those tests in as little as one day. An operator simply cannot learn everything important about safe operation in that short a time.

How do some trainers teach an operator an impossible amount of knowledge so quickly? They *teach to the test*.

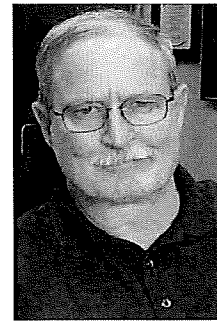
Over time, test questions become widely known or the tests get reconstructed. That makes it much easier to *teach to the test*.

For many, operators becoming certified is the objective, not real, comprehensive training.

Even though *teaching to the test* can bring a passing score, operators trained that way are not going to contribute much to safety on a job site. They simply haven't been taught enough.

That is not what OSHA had in mind when the training requirement was mandated. Sadly, training has taken a back seat to certification.

The Crane Institute of America takes three to four hard days of training, including outside assignments, to cover the knowledge mandated by OSHA.



By James Headley

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We never *teach to the test*. We have proven that operators attending a training program developed using a model such as Instructional Systems Development (ISD) accomplishes at least three things.

One, operators will be better equipped because of their increased understanding of the crane and how to operate it safely.

Two, it documents the operator's training development, which helps in an OSHA investigation or liability issues.

Three, operators find it easier to pass the written exams needed for certification.

Employers Beware

OSHA can cite an employer because a crane operator is not trained adequately, even if the operator is certified.

A recent OSHA compliance directive tells its officers to consider citing an employer "because the training provided did not cover the requisite knowledge and skills listed in paragraphs (j)(1) and (2) of 1926.1427."

That directive lists some of the questions OSHA officers could ask in order to determine whether an employer has met its responsibility for operator training:

- What did they learn?
- How long does training last?
- What was the training about?
- Did the training involve operating the equipment or performing activities, or was it verbal only?
- How did the employer determine the trainer was qualified to train?
- Did the employer comply with all other operator-in-training requirements, including contentious monitoring (29CFR 1927.1427(b))?

Employers should make sure that training truly teaches their operators to work safely, as OSHA intended, not just how to pass the certification test. ■