

Readers

Letters



The following open letter was sent to the CPA by contractor St James Group, regarding an incident in London with a telescopic crawler crane. The letter refers to a report that has now been published and fully details the cause of the incident. The report is an ideal document which provides lessons for rental companies, manufacturers and end users alike. Imagine how safety and development would progress if this was the response to every incident?

Mr Haydn Steele Crane Interest Group,
Construction Plant-Hire Association,
27/28 Newbury Street,
Barbican, London, EC1A 7HU
14th March 2017

Dear Mr Steele,

St James Crawler Crane Incident (9th January 2017)

On 9th January 2017, a serious incident occurred at a St James Group construction site that involved a Hitachi-Sumitomo SCX400T hydraulic crawled crane.

During the lifting of a compressor, the crane's boom began to rapidly descend toward the ground due to a mechanical system failure. The incident was reported to the Health and Safety Executive as a Dangerous Occurrence on the day of the incident (F2508 reference: 57D39D61 DF).

A joint investigation was undertaken with Eagle Crawler Crane Hire Ltd (the crane owner) and NRC Plant Ltd (UK distributor for Hitachi-Sumitomo Cranes).

All parties have agreed that the direct cause of the telescopic boom collapsing, was the fracturing of an adaptor that mounted a hydraulic gauge snubber and pressure transducer to the hydraulic actuator supporting the telescopic boom. The 'hole' left by the adaptor allowed hydraulic oil to leak out of the system and the boom to rapidly collapse to a horizontal position.

NRC Plant have confirmed that the mounting adaptor was fitted as original equipment to the crane by the Hitachi Cranes European importer/representative. An independent report by Penenden Engineering suggests that the likely cause of the adaptor fracturing was metal fatigue - Hitachi Sumitomo do not specify a service life for the failed part.

We draw this incident to your attention, as we believe there is a potential misperception within the construction industry, that hydraulic cranes are fitted with check valves that prevent hydraulic system failures resulting in such incidents.

St James Group deem it has a professional and moral duty to raise this potential design failure with the CPA Crane Interest Group. Could we ask that you please bring the matter to the attention of your members and in turn raise the matter with manufacturers.

We would be willing (subject to legal approvals) to share the CCTV footage and reports, if you so request it.

Yours Sincerely,

Brian Orminston

Head of Sustainability/Health & Safety
ST James Group

The report simply provides greater details of what it covers, along with good photographs from the scene and the failed components. This can be seen on line at www.vertikal.net/en/news/story/27858/

Staying on safety bulletins we received three letters/emails this month on a new protocol for the writing of Safety Alerts mainly because we were a little slow to publish it online. The fact is that a well-meaning contractor's health & safety officer may draft what might be intended as an internal alert to warn colleagues of an incident involving a machine, often standing down similar machines while an investigation continues. The problem is that those receiving the alert share it with friends at other companies and within a few hours it goes viral causing a major issue for a specific machine which may well not have been at fault in the first place.

Dear Leigh,

The Strategic Forum Plant Safety Group - MEWP Safety Group has published a Safety Alert Protocol following members' concerns of specific instances where safety alerts had either been issued with incorrect information, or without notification or consultation with parties identified in the bulletin or recirculated bulletins years after the original incident.

As you are aware, the circulation of factually incorrect, misleading or poorly written information contained in a safety alert can and does repeatedly cause unnecessary confusion within the industry. Once issued the author loses control of the document, as it is passed from company to company around the world, often being re-issued or rebranded with a different company letter head and frequently re-appearing years after it was first issued. In some cases, the misinformation has had the opposite effect to that intended by the author and negatively affects confidence with a specific machine or manufacturer, which may ultimately compromise safety in the workplace. It was specifically to address these concerns that the Safety Alert Protocol was drafted and approved by the group.

The document is now being presented to other industry groups such as CONIAC, CPA's Cranes Interest Group and BuildUK, for their consideration with the hope that it can be adopted, supported, promoted, by other organisations and for other types of plant, bringing uniformity and consistency to address an issue that goes beyond aerial work platforms and the UK market.

I have been watching the Vertikal website in the hope that you would publish a news item bringing the document to the attention of your wider readership, but as yet have not seen one. Is that for any specific reason? Did you receive any notification from CPA or IPAF? I would really appreciate it if you would consider publishing a news article bringing it to the attention of the industry. Or if you feel that is not possible I would love to understand and appreciate your reasoning.

Kind Regards

This letter was an amalgam of two of the letters we received and given that it mixes words we thought the right thing to do was not to publish the writers names. As to why we did not publish the announcement right away? No reason apart from pressure of too much work for our small staff with a spate of exhibitions and events in the first few months of the year. And it then got overlooked for a week or two. It is a subject close to our heart and we have published it in full and hosted the protocol in the Library section of our website www.vertikal.net/uploads/tx_filelinks/mewp-safety-alert-protocol_-2017-02-15.pdf



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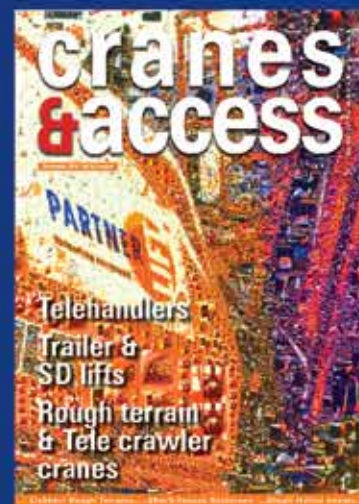
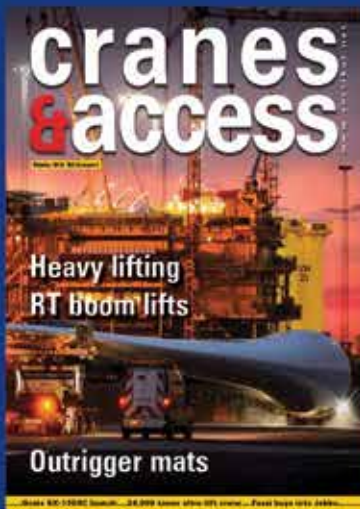
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Dear Leigh.

I hope you are well.

Please see attached some photos of our Grove GMK4100L crane that 'rolled over' last Thursday evening. We are all very quick to publish our 'good news' stories (eg, new crane arrivals, recent project awards, pictures of spectacular lifts and events we are involved in) but the reality is that events like this incident happen us all and if we all were to share our 'bad news' stories it might serve to:

1. Highlight the risks to some who may not know.
2. Maybe help avoid a similar event occurring to another company.
3. Detail the impact an event like this has on a) a small company like ours b) those involved in the recovery operation & c) the environment.
4. Discuss preventative measures.

The crane was being escorted along a route that was unfit to carry it and despite HEROIC efforts by the operator to save it - the road split and he hadn't a chance.

Our operators are told that, in the event of road subsidence - make every effort to extend the outriggers on the 'good side' and if the ground is good enough to carry the crane for such time that 1 x (or better with 2) excavators can be sourced to apply weight on the outriggers - this acts as a levering effect that will stabilise the crane and in many cases be sufficient to allow the crane to be removed using crab steer. (this is the best tip I can offer any crane user - it should be discussed with all operators as it DOES work).

So no, the crane wasn't driving with its outriggers extended as I have heard said, what a ridiculous, ill-informed comment.

The crane is upright again after 4 days of hard work by a fantastic team of lads, but it will be a further 3 - 4 days before the operation is complete to allow time to safely remove the recovery crane and winch vehicle, gather up all the equipment that was required, and to reinstate the surrounding area to leave it as it was prior to the incident.

I will issue a full report in the coming days, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who helped with the recovery, the many offers of help and assistance, texts and e-mails of support etc and also to advise the 'haters' that you should not laugh at others misfortune because it is very true that this is indeed, 'out there waiting on us all'.

Thanks Leigh, and kind regards,

Cathal McNally

BOSSLIFT

We applaud Cathal McNally and his team, it is true that with the best will in the world an incident such as this can happen to the best in the business. By sharing the details we can all learn, while highlighting the risks of access to remote sites. Hopefully this and the letter from St James are signs that the industry is beginning to adopt a more mature and open attitude towards reporting on such incidents which will have a positive impact on long term safety.



Norman Kelsey

1941 - 2017

We received the news in mid-April, that Norman Kelsey, a former national service manager at Hewden Stuart Crane Hire passed away at 75.

Kelsey retired in 2007 after 37 years with the company, he was a popular and widely respected engineer who spent most of his working life in the crane industry and regularly participated in the development and improvement of industry from a technical and safety point of view. He is survived by his wife Pauline.

Comments from others included:

I was saddened this weekend to hear of Norman passing away. I worked with Norman for many years and he was one of those people you just relied on to perform because he always did. I can recall many occasions when big cranes were booked for critical jobs and standing at the side of a motorway in the middle of the night in snow and rain. Very often when all looked lost Norman would be under the troubled crane and one way or another it would be on its way again.

I send my sincere condolences to Pauline and family.

Rest in peace old lad!

Ray Ledger

Norman was one of the Greats in our Industry. He could rightly hammer you for any fault but then kindly offer a solution. His knowledge was vast and a credit to Hewden and well respected and valued by them. Many improvements in cranes were down to his understanding of what wouldn't break. It was an honour to have worked alongside him as a supplier and friend.

Barry Barnes

Sad news, Norman was one of the good guys, always up to his elbows in oil, with or without overalls. Not many of his ilk left now, God bless you mate

Anon