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Crane meeting stirs emotions

The subject of bureaucracy dominated this year's CPA Crane Interest Group meeting, from fuel regulations to proposed London clean-air rules.

Chairman Martin Ainscough, opening the meeting, asked "What has changed in the last twelve months?" "We have more bureaucracy, which means more cost, but has it made any difference? Are we working safer, are we making more money? Is the industry any better than a year ago? We put up with everything they throw at us, and in my experience, this simply proves that our industry complies, and copes."



Dan Wright of ESDAL presented the web based abnormal load programme

New web based abnormal load notification

Dan Wright of ESDAL, the Electronic Service Delivery for Abnormal Loads, presented an update on the Internet-based system which held the entire meeting fascinated.

"You currently have to send notification of your movements to the police, the railways, and various other people who are often difficult to identify, it's very easy to get caught out" he said

"The British Waterways Authority alone receives one and a half million movement notifications a year most of them just in case they own a structure on a given route.

The solution he said is the web based database which holds details of every notifiable structure on every route in the UK, with up to date details of who owns every single one of them, and the contact details of the appropriate person. It will put an end to any doubt as to who should be notified about what, because a route traced across a standard map will pick up details of every hazard on that route.

"The idea is to replace all the faxes with the website," observed Wright.

There are thought to be 120,000 relevant hazards already identified, with about another 80,000 to go. These hazards, which probably includes every bridge in the UK, are already registered on the Highways Agency website, and so when a company logs a proposed journey, the software automatically highlights every known hazard on that route.

Logging the route is quite straightforward. The user either enters the address or postcodes for start and finish and the software recommends the route to take, but it also allows for a route to be 'proposed' on something like a join-up-the-dots system.

At the moment a route can be plotted and a list of all notifiable persons who are likely to be affected, printed out. In phase two, next year, simply logging the route will automatically send an email notification to those people.

All a crane owner needs is Internet access and to register for the scheme. Registration forms will be available in a few weeks' time.

Red Diesel, a loosing battle?

There is a real risk that the crane industry will lose its fight over the continuing use of red diesel. If so, the best that can be hoped for is a three-year transition period – but there is a small possibility the government may yet be swayed. That was the gist of John Varcoe and Geoffrey Marsh's report on the campaign to keep cranes on the 'excepted vehicle' list.

The industry had been given the chance to put its views forward, said Varcoe, and had sent in a paper which presented the industry's views.

The major argument has been over whether cranes travelling to and from jobs is 'incidental use' of a vehicle on a public road. The other point is that red diesel is dirty – but that is set to change by 2008.

"We have also pointed out that crane companies will have to install white-fuel tanks in their depots – either that, or fill up at forecourts, which will cause problems to other users.

"So now we have been asked for further information concerning the amount of fuel used on the highway as opposed to on site. "Whether we will win or not, we can't say"

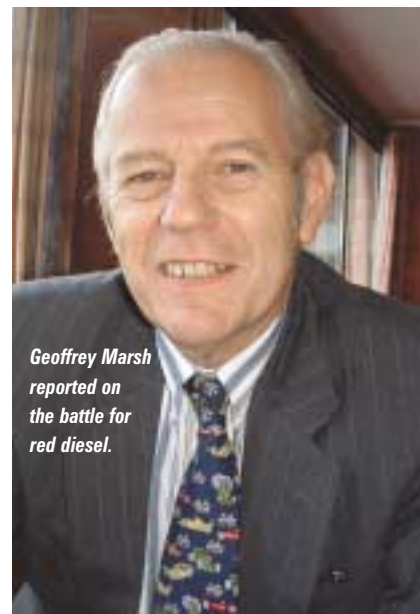
Marsh reported on his meetings with government, "We did not expect much from the Treasury – we know Customs and Excise simply want no red diesel, it saves them the enforcement problem, but we were interested to see what the Treasury says about introducing what is a stealth tax. Our industry is a soft touch which won't cost too many votes. We are

just not like the French, who protest immediately and are then protected by subsidies – perhaps we don't protest enough."

Marsh urged all crane hirers to write to their MPs. "It is up to everyone to do this, and turn it into a political situation if we can, to heighten awareness. I stress – heighten the awareness, because if we do have to educate our customers to pay more, the awareness will already be there."

"If we do get thrown off the list, and we have to turn to white diesel, then we are facing a major cost hike – and this industry is not famous for its ability to pass costs on."

Colin Wood of the CPA was asked about support from other trade associations. He said that the Construction Federation had been warned that crane prices would go up, but the crane industry's poor record of fighting for price increases, caused little response.



Geoffrey Marsh reported on the battle for red diesel.

The HSE warns on crane hire without a plan

The HSE presentation came from Sue Thompson "There have been 18 fatalities associated with lifting since 1999," she reported. "Information from all spheres of the industry says that better planning of lifting operations is still needed.

"We want to improve the planning of lifting operations, and we want to know that lifting is understood and properly managed. You may say you've got that covered, but we have a lot of evidence gathered after accidents, showing that wrong equipment was used. We believe that many small companies don't have a handle on this or on the role of lift supervisor or appointed person"

Some lifts are still carried out under crane hire rules without planning, by those not competent to perform it. We have visited 21 crane hire companies to check on procedures to assess the competence of customers. We asked what

questions they asked to determine the use of the right crane, whether they looked for a written lifting plan when they arrived on site, and what their operator would do if he thought the site was unsafe.

"We found that there was no need for enforcement action. Operators were well trained and new entrants under close supervision. We found that staff understood the difference between contract hire and crane hire."

What did concern her, she said was the view that some hirers have, that refusing a crane hire when in doubt wasn't realistic and would simply send business down the road to someone else.

"So in some cases, cranes go out under crane-hire and if there is no plan, the operator assesses the situation, and if satisfied, does the job anyway. In effect this is a contract lift without a plan!

This might be a good service to the customer, but it doesn't leave the hirer in a good position. "In the event of an accident on such a lift, the hire company would have a difficult time claiming they were not responsible, if their man on site had worked on his own initiative.

She concluded that apart from this problem, her team had come away "with a picture of an industry making progress. In 2005-6, we are looking at tower cranes, while in 2006-7, every field visit will look at slinging, lifting, and planning."

Appointed person & Crane Supervisor instructors

Peter Brown reported on the Appointed Persons and Crane Supervisor instructor programmes.

"We have only received 62 applications from instructors, many of them already delivering training. 40 of them were approved to take the test, 28 tests were actually undertaken, and of those only 12 passed" said Brown.

"So why was there such a low pass rate? Not because the standard had been set too high, it seems that many candidates were just not sufficiently prepared. Additionally too many people are being sent for training as Appointed Persons who had never seen a crane before".



London and its Clean air rules – Jan 2006!

Although it is a serious issue, there was disbelieving laughter when John Varcoe highlighted clean-air legislation on London sites. The Greater London Authority said earlier this year that it wants all diesel powered construction plant to be fitted with particulate filters and to run on ultra-low sulphur diesel by the end of 2006.

The idea comes from PRECIS (Partnership in Reducing Emissions from Construction Industry Sites) which wants the UK to lead the way by immediately adopting a European directive that requires compliance by the end of 2010.

"PRECIS is a partnership of quangos and researchers which has produced a code of practice," said Varcoe. "Neither the CPA nor the Construction federation were informed – which means they're planning on reducing emissions on construction sites without telling the construction industry!"

"London is now proposing that from next year diesel-particulate filters are fitted and ultra-low sulphur (red) diesel, which is not yet available in this country be used! "Mobile cranes are on the list of equipment to be fitted with these things, and we have thoroughly condemned it.

"The deadline means that every tender from January 2006 is going to be subject to this, and it is reported that equipment without fitted filters will not be allowed on site.

"There are already moves to introduce it in Birmingham, Bristol and Manchester" More disbelief followed when proposed installations were shown, they appeared totally impractical. The CPA is following a technical line to try and obtain an exception for cranes.



John Varcoe covered Londons new Clean air rules

Crane apprentices

Myerscough College, the Lancashire further-education site was the first to open a training facility devoted to the crane and lifting industry.

"We are one year on, and have had a successful year," reported the college's Jack Holden. "We've taken on 36 apprentices – the first were from the Ainscough group, and now another twelve companies have sent apprentices to us.

"A Jardine and Sons have donated a crane and Briggs & Stratton have provided 60 engines to be stripped down and rebuilt. Ainscough has provided components, and JCB Transmissions has provided axles and gearboxes, Liebherr has also donated engines.

Ainscough reported that the first year of an apprentice's training effectively comes out at a zero cost thanks to the grants available. While the second year does cost, by that time, the apprentices are contributing enough to the company for it to be cost-effective.

Work at Height regulations for cranes

Work At Height regulations, and how they affect mobile cranes was presented by Tim Watson. "Over 50 percent of serious injuries are from falls of below two metres – and there were 2,330 of them in the year 2003-4." This, he pointed out, raises the question of rigging on even the smallest crane, and involves virtually all maintenance and inspection work.

"The ways of minimising risk are to avoid work at height if possible, If not prevent falls by guard rails, and third, minimise the risk or consequences..

"It is up to us to come up with sensible guidelines how we do this, or we will find ourselves in a situation I have actually heard of – onsite safety officers demanding scaffolding around a vehicle before you load it, which is plainly bonkers.

Some companies have already fitted holding brackets for ladders and attachment points for harnesses.