February 2016 – safe lifting operations delivered by competent people

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SHE & HV advisory services

A recent prosecution by the HSE has highlighted the need to properly resource, plan and organise lifting operations so they are carried out in a safe manner. The following links provide more information.

http://press.hse.gov.uk/2016/major-construction-firm-fined-1million-after-death-of-worker/?eban=govdel-press-release&cr=25-Jan-2016

http://www.ioshmagazine.com/article/balfour-beatty-should-have-waited-right-plant?utm_source=IOSH_membership_030216_updated&utm_medium=email&utm_content=http%3a%2f%2fwww.ioshmagazine.com%2farticle%2fbalfour-beatty-should-have-waited-right-plant&utm_campaign=IOSH+Newsletter+03+February++2016+Membership

Before focussing on the fundamentals of delivering safe lifting operations through compliance with the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER), it is of equal importance that priority is placed on the culture of the organisation and the people involved.

Competent people are required at each stage of resourcing, planning and organising lifting operations so the operations are carried out in a safe manner. The people involved should have sufficient theoretical and practical knowledge of the work and equipment in question, as well as the requirements of the law, to be able to do this properly. For complex and high-risk operations, the planning and organisation should be extensive and meticulous.

NB A reminder that competence means a combination of the right skills, knowledge and experience, supported by appropriate supervision and monitoring and regular assessment of competence by the employer

However, competent people also need the confidence to be able to operate within an organisational culture that facilitates discussion and challenge to ensure people choose to do the right thing, even when no-one is watching. Examples include:

- Has the right equipment been specified and is it available?
- Is the equipment being used correctly?
- Has the equipment been inspected?
- Is the equipment in good condition?
- Are there perceived time pressures?
- Have deviations from RAMS and good practice become ‘custom and practice’?
- Have perceptions of risk become lowered?
- Are people encouraged to ‘stop and ask’ if they are not sure of anything?
- Is reporting of hazards and near misses encouraged?
- Are reports investigated and feedback provided?

Without an organisational culture where safety is a core value, incidents and injuries are unfortunately more likely to occur.

The fundamentals of delivering safe lifting operations:

Planning

All lifting operations involving lifting equipment must be:

- properly planned by a competent person
- appropriately supervised, and
- carried out in a safe manner

For straightforward, common lifting operations, a single initial generic plan may be all that is required (eg fork-lift trucks in a factory), which could be part of the normal risk assessment for the activity. The plan should also be supported by a dynamic (point of work) risk assessment. It is good practice to routinely review the plan to make sure that nothing has changed and the plan remains valid.

Routine lifting operations which are a little more complex may, depending on the circumstances, need to be risk assessed and planned each time the lifting operation is carried out.

For much more complex lifting operations the risk assessment will identify the need for a written plan which should be developed by a person with significant and specific competencies - adequate training, knowledge, skills and expertise - suitable for the level of the task.

The plan for any lifting operation must address the foreseeable risks involved in the work and identify the appropriate resources (including people) necessary for safe completion of the job. The degree of planning and complexity of the plan will vary and should be proportionate to the foreseeable risks involved in the work.

Strength and stability

Lifting equipment must be of adequate strength for the proposed use. The assessment of this should recognise that there may be a combination of forces to which the lifting equipment, including the accessories, will be subjected. The lifting equipment used should provide an appropriate 'factor of safety' against all foreseeable types of failure.

Lifting equipment (including accessories) must be thoroughly examined as defined below:

- before first use (unless there is a valid Declaration of Conformity made less than 12 months earlier)
- where it depends on installation, or re-installation / assembly at another site
- where it is exposed to conditions causing deterioration, liable to result in danger
- Lifting equipment may need to be thoroughly examined in use at periods specified in the Regulations:
    - Equipment used for lifting people at least six monthly
    - All other equipment at least annually

Or at intervals laid down in an examination scheme drawn up by a competent person (ie someone with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience)

Positioning and installation

The position of mobile lifting equipment or the location of fixed installations can have a dramatic effect on the risks involved in a lifting operation. It is vital to take all practical steps to avoid people being struck by loads or the equipment itself during use. The equipment should also be positioned to minimise the need to lift over people. Measures should be taken to reduce the risk of load drift (eg spinning, swinging, etc); and of the load falling freely or being released unintentionally.

When positioning lifting equipment, care must be exercised to avoid hazards arising from proximity, for example: coming into contact with overhead power lines, buildings or structures; coming too close to trenches, excavations or other operations; and coming into contact with buried underground services, such as drains and sewers.

Working under suspended loads

Where it can be avoided, loads should not be suspended over occupied areas. Where it cannot be avoided, the risks to people must be minimised by safe systems of work and appropriate precautions. Where loads are suspended for significant periods, the area below them should be classed as a danger zone, where access is restricted.

Supervision of lifting operations

Supervision should be proportionate to the risk, taking account of the competencies and experience of those undertaking the lift. Many everyday lifting operations do not require direct supervision (eg experienced fork-lift operators undertaking routine lifts), although there may be circumstances where supervisory assistance may be required to manage risk (eg lifting an unusual load, crossing a public road etc). From time to time, employers may need to monitor the competence of workers undertaking lifting operations to ensure they continue to be carried out safely.

Guidance on planning, organising and undertaking lifting operations

More detailed advice on the planning, organising and undertaking of lifting operations is provided in the LOLER Approved Code of Practice and guidance.

Particular guidance is given on:

- competence of people planning lifting (regulation 8; ACOP para 210 onwards)
- suitability, including strength and stability, of lifting equipment (regulation 4; ACOP para 98 onwards)
- positioning of lifting equipment and visibility (regulation 6; ACOP paras 161 and 237 onwards)
- working under suspended loads (regulation 8; ACOP para 230 onwards)
- attaching / detaching and securing loads (regulation 8; ACOP para 244 onwards)
- location, including access (ACOP paras 256 and 62 onwards)
- environment of use, including operator protection, the effects of wind and mobility (regulation 8; ACOP paras 83, 253, 89 and 112 onwards)
- overturning (regulation 8; ACOP para 258 onwards)

- proximity to other hazards, such as overhead power lines and buried services (regulation 8; ACOP para 265 onwards)
- derating (regulation 8; ACOP paras 111 and 274 onwards)
- the lifting of people (regulation 5; ACOP para 127 onwards)
- preventing overload (regulation 4; ACOP para 122 onwards)
- pre-use checks (regulation 8; ACOP para 285 onwards)
- the continued integrity of lifting equipment (regulation 8; ACOP para 289 onwards)

The content of this article is intended to provide a general guide to the subject matter. Specialist advice should be sought about your specific circumstances.

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