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CPWR RELEASES REPORT ON CRANE DEATHS WITH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTING MORE FATALITIES, INJURIES

*BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION TRADES DEPARTMENT, AFL-CIO, GREATER NEW YORK
BUILDING TRADES COUNCIL AND OPERATING ENGINEERS UNION
JOIN IN RELEASE OF REPORT, RECOMMENDATIONS*

An in-depth report on U.S. crane fatalities found the number of crane-related deaths among construction workers is significant, with an average of 22 workers killed annually. The report, authored by Director of Safety Research Michael McCann and two colleagues at CPWR – The Center for Construction Research and Training, also lists examples of crane incidents that resulted in bystander fatality or injury gathered from news reports.

The report's findings, released June 17, used Bureau of Labor Statistics' worker fatality data from 1992 to 2006 on construction workers: the numbers and causes of death, the trades of workers involved, the size of employers, and types of cranes involved.

Perhaps most important, the report gives **eight recommendations to prevent fatalities and injuries** from occurring. The recommendations, which draw from issues apparent in the findings and McCann's 34 years analyzing and writing about safety and health, suggest a national certification program for crane operators, crane inspectors, and for the signalpersons and riggers who manage the crane load and its direction. Another recommendation is the thorough inspection of cranes by a certified crane inspector after the crane is assembled but before it is used. The report recommends that a crane load should not pass over street traffic, suggests OSHA conduct more thorough investigations and more detailed reporting of crane fatalities when they occur, and urges action on public comment and adoption of OSHA's proposed crane and derrick standards, including the recommendations within this report.

"The deaths of Donald Leo and Ramadan Kurtaj May 30 when a tower crane collapsed in New York City are just the latest in a long list of workers who have died in work-related incidents involving cranes," said Mark H. Ayers, President of the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO. "We in the trades mourn every single loss, and we offer our thoughts and prayers to the families of these men. These losses are bitter to us because, in almost every instance, they are preventable. CPWR's recommendations would benefit all construction workers, as well as those who live and work near cranes, if they are implemented nationwide."

"We need to hold government accountable for its role in ensuring the lives of America's workers," said Vincent J. Giblin, President of the International Union of Operating Engineers. "We need OSHA to enforce the standards they have and create new standards where there is an obvious need."

Despite the media attention given recent crane collapses, the CPWR report found the leading cause of death among workers was electrocution when the crane touched an overhead power line. Of the 323

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worker deaths recorded by BLS, 102 workers (32%) were electrocuted and 68 workers (21%) died due to a crane collapse. Of the 59 deaths (18%) of workers struck by crane boom/jib, 52 deaths were caused by falling booms or jibs (the jib is the short piece that extends on the other side of the boom). A falling boom or jib can happen when the crane is being assembled or dismantled. Other causes of crane-related deaths are described in the report.

The findings show more than half of worker deaths were among construction laborers and heavy equipment operators. Workers employed by small contractors represent a large portion (about one-third) of total deaths. Although tower crane collapses are dramatic, most crane-related deaths involved mobile cranes. The intersection of electrocutions from power lines and mobile cranes bears noting.

“Construction workers are counting on employers and OSHA to keep them safe on the job,” said Edward Malloy, President of both the Greater New York and the New York State Building and Construction Trades Councils. “Union contractors and unions spend millions of dollars training workers – we know we bring that to the table. But poorly maintained equipment or a ‘speed up’ work schedule can bring disaster to any worker, even the best trained one.”

BCTD President Ayers agreed, saying, “OSHA needs to put in place its Safety Standards for Cranes and Derricks, which have been gathering dust at that agency for four years. In 2003, OSHA established a rulemaking committee that had representatives of suppliers, manufacturers and users on it. They produced a consensus document in July of 2004, and OSHA has failed to move it to the next step, publishing the proposed standard. Secretary Chao’s December 2007 regulatory plan stated they would have the standard proposed by January 2008, and that didn’t happen. Then the May 2008 plan said it would be out August 2008. Meanwhile, more construction workers die, bystanders and first responders are injured, killed and put at risk, and we wait for OSHA to act.”

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