

# Certification Gets a Lift

*How new OSHA requirements are affecting the truck-and-crane industry.*

**A lot of industries use crane trucks.** For instance, construction companies employ them in lifting, moving, and installing building parts, whereas the marine industry utilizes them on land and out at sea to lift, dredge, and load and unload cargo. And sign builders use them for anything that has to come off the ground—such as to hang a sign or send up maintenance men for repairs and replacements.

But as the industry has grown more sophisticated, so too have the signs, their size, and the equipment used to install them. As signs grew larger, the mechanical lift variety gave way to hydraulic driven lift systems. Eventually the truck manufacturers introduced sophisticated hydraulics with onboard operation, handheld controls, and more, as the crane and truck industry met the new demands.

But as grows an industry, so too grows government control.

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On July 8, 2010, the United States Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) released the updated standard for use of cranes and derricks, Rule 29 CFR Part 1926 of the Code of Federal Regulations. It replaces the older standard and took effect August 9, 2010.

It has introduced new regulations for

crane and boom operators who operate any crane lifting over 2,000 pounds. Now OSHA wants crane operators certified after passing through two weeks of training (and it must be completed before 2014).

In summary, to operate a crane, anyone eighteen years old and older has to agree to abide by the standards set by the National Commission for the

Certification of Crane Operators (NCCCO) ([www.nccco.org](http://www.nccco.org)), comply with the physical requirements expected, and pass a written and practical exam to earn the operator's license to use these cranes and boom trucks.

"The new code addresses ground conditions, the assembly or disassembly of equipment, power line safety, inspection of equipment, safety devices, operation of equipment, and fall protection," says Mark McLaughlin, PR and marketing coordinator for MANCOMM ([www.mancomm.com](http://www.mancomm.com)), a national safety and compliance-based publisher.

The crane certification training is transferable, and the certification is valid for five years. Both the NCCCO and OSHA recognize some military crane training towards certification, however audited training done through an employer isn't acceptable for certification.

Already the International Sign Association (ISA) in Alexandria, Virginia, has been holding training classes and conducting tests for this certification since the beginning of this year. They will be offering training throughout the remainder of the year at a variety of cities listed on their Web site ([www.signs.org](http://www.signs.org)).

The new training reviews OSHA violations, and because of the heights crane operators work at, emphasis is placed on fall protection. It comes second among the top ten cited OSHA



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violations in 2010.

"According to OSHA, any time a worker is at a height of four feet or more, the worker is at risk and needs to be protected. Fall protection must be provided at four feet in general industry, five feet in the maritime industry, and six feet in construction. Regardless of the fall distance, fall protection must be provided when working over dangerous equipment and machinery," says McLaughlin.

Installers attendant to their work at heights often under fifty feet working on

open platforms are at risk from a fall. In 2010, OSHA recorded 6,771 fall violations of which 617 people died from falling in OSHA-regulated industries.

After fall protection, power line safety gets quite a bit of attention. A lot of signs go up along roads lined with small strip-malls that are threaded with power lines.

The NCCCO test provides for specific training on "how to prevent contact with power lines," points out ISA in its explanation of the new OSHA regulations.

Several manufacturers indicate that they feel comfortable with the changes and don't see them as a threat to their businesses.

"The new OSHA regulations are a positive move towards ensuring qualified/certified operators are at the controls. Operation of forklifts has required training and certification for many years, whereas anyone can operate a crane from 1-ton to 1000-ton without a training certificate," says Randy Robertson, director of sales and marketing at Manitex ([www.manitex.com](http://www.manitex.com)). "We foresee no loss of business and feel that the new requirements will greatly improve safe operation."

In a harsh economy, new regulations add to costs in already financially strapped sign companies. Owning and operating these vehicles is especially costly to the smaller shops that need the trucks and cranes to do their work.

The sign companies have to pay their employees while they're in training and not at the shop. "This can get costly. The companies have to send their guys off for a couple of weeks, plus the cost of the training," says Tom Bradley, president of Radocy Cranes ([www.radocy.com](http://www.radocy.com)).

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To clarify what his company gets for the training, Jim Glazer of Elliott Equipment ([www.elliotequip.com](http://www.elliotequip.com)) puts it this way: "The new OSHA regulations affect operators working with cranes that are rated to lift in excess of 2,000 pounds. Operators have until November 2014 to be certified but must be classified as 'in training' prior to that."

"OSHA's definition of an operator-in-training includes having received sufficient training from the employer to operate the crane safely and being continuously monitored by an operator's trainer. In addition, there are restrictions on the type of lifts an operator in training can make."

Glazer says training will help the operators meet the complexities of more contemporary crane and boom operation. "We've seen to change to our business as the result of these regulations," he explains. "If anything, we view them as a positive for the industry—in that they will raise the overall performance level of operators in the field and safety level for the sign industry as a whole."

"This, in turn, should lead to lower insurance premiums and better billing rates over the long term."

Mike Bradley, vice president at Radocy, says that the new OSHA regulations also haven't affected their business very much, but he's definitely hearing from customers about it. "I'm trying to understand it a little bit better before I give them a definitive answer and tell them they've got a couple of years and to not fret right now," he says. "We'll get answers to them as soon as we can."

Another thing Bradley has noticed is that customers are ordering fewer heavier lifting cranes (3,000 to 6,000 pounds), while sales figures for the more economical lighter lifting cranes (in the 1,200- to 2,000-pound range) are higher.

"With technology, all signs are getting lighter," he says. "Today's signs are engineered a lot better and don't have the extra weight you'd find years ago. So cranes don't have to be as big."

Bradley points out that message centers are playing a significant role here, since there's not as much need now to change out signs all the time. "It's now a matter of just reprogramming the LEDs or changing light bulbs, so you don't need many heavy cranes to get up there," he says. "Also there's less regulation on the cranes that lift less." ■

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