

## **Zooming in on Certification**

*By Tracy Bennett*

The industry is finally looking at crane operation with a wide-angle lens. No longer is the focus solely on the operator. Maintenance and repair workers, riggers, signal persons, and crane inspectors also bear important responsibilities. Recognizing that crane safety takes a team of individuals working together, OSHA has proposed certification requirements for operators; qualification requirements for signal persons; and the agency requested comment from the industry on the need for crane inspectors to be qualified.

Allowing for a four-year phase-in period, the proposed rule for 29 CFR Part 1926 (Cranes and Derricks in Construction) outlines several options for employers to implement operator certification. These options include 1) testing provided by an accredited organization; 2) audited employer certification; 3) qualification by the U.S. military; and 4) licensing by a government entity. Only the first option offers an operator fully portable certification from employer to employer.

In order for individuals to serve as a signal person, they must either be evaluated by a qualified third-party vendor or by their employer. Qualified signal persons must be able to pass knowledge and practical tests, and carry documentation attesting that they understand signals and basic crane operation and limitations. Only those that have been qualified by a third-party will possess a portable qualification.

Additionally, OSHA has sought public comment on whether a similar approach to evaluating qualifications should be applied to crane inspectors.

Meanwhile, several organizations are poised to meet the need for certified and qualified workers.

### **Operators**

Since 1996 the National Commission for the Certification of Crane Operators has offered crane operator certification, and it has been accredited since 1998. The Fairfax, Va.-based organization continues to add categories to its menu of certifications. For operators, the newest category in development is knuckleboom cranes. NCCCO is working with the Articulating Crane Council of North America, a product group of the National Truck Equipment Association, to develop the program. Test development is expected to be completed by the third quarter of 2009.

In addition, union workers could get accredited certification through the Operating Engineers' Local 12 in Pasadena, Calif., available since 2005.

However, options are now expanding for operators and employers seeking accredited certification. Among the newest is Crane Institute Certification (CIC), Sanford, Fla., which offers accredited crane operator certifications in five categories. "CIC more than meets OSHA's proposed requirement for testing and verifying operators," said Debbie Dickinson, executive director of CIC. According to Dickinson, one of the most common questions the testing organization gets from prospective applicants is whether CIC certification will be accepted by employers and state and federal agencies. She assures them that it does meet the need for accredited certification. "Operators finally have a choice," she said.

Accredited by the National Commission of Certifying Agencies (NCCA) since August 2008, CIC now has written test sites in all 50 states and practical examiners in eight states. While CIC continues to seek additional practical examiners, the organization has created a mobile practical examiner task force to fill the gap. The task force travels to vicinities near customers, as

needed. More than 5,500 exams have been administered to date and according to Dickinson , the average pass rate is 90 percent for the general knowledge portion and 72 percent for the supplemental/specialty exams.

Also new are convenient multi-category test packages. Ideal for operators who must be certified for several types of cranes, the test packages eliminate redundancies; reduce the amount of time required to earn multiple certifications, and reduce the overall cost for operators. One test package assesses general, supplemental, and practical knowledge necessary to earn five separate certifications.

One other convenience CIC offers applicants is the opportunity to use a calculator during written exams. “Preserving exam security is a key reason there has been so much debate over whether calculators should be allowed during testing,” explained Dickinson . However, CIC worked through the security issues with the NCCA, which has approved their use on CIC exams. No outside calculators will be allowed; CIC will provide and collect the calculators at exam time at no additional charge.

Finally, CIC now offers customer support in Spanish to assist Spanish-speaking applicants during the registration process. “Ultimately, we hope to also offer the exams in Spanish as well,” said Dickinson . “Spanish-speaking workers are a reality today. While clear communication between the operator and others on the job is essential, speaking Spanish doesn’t necessarily preclude an individual from being a qualified operator,” explained Dickinson . “Employers must consider many factors – including qualifications and experience – when making hiring decisions.”

Currently, certification is simply an assessment of minimum qualifications. “Experience matters, and someday I would love to see the industry evolve to offer both entry-level and advanced-level operator certifications,” she said.

**Sincerely,**

**Tracy Bennett, Editorial Director**

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