

# Attempt to disassemble crane boom proves fatal

Most safety precautions regarding cranes pertain to when the machine is in operation. But, the process of assembling or dismantling a crane can be fraught with danger.

In this instance, a 37-year-old Hispanic carpenter's helper had been called upon to help the crane operator take apart the sections of an 80-foot lattice boom crane. The carpenter's helper was from Mexico and did not speak English.

The company crews conducted daily safety huddles each morning before work, in both English and Spanish. On the day of the accident, however, the safety huddle was canceled because the site supervisor arrived late.

The crane operator was educated and certified to work with this type of crane, and usually used a team of two trained workers to help him with the breakdown. On the day of the accident, though, both were unavailable.

The accident happened early in the morning. The crews were working with a sense of urgency because the concrete bridge decking was on a truck en route to the site. The carpenter's helper had been asked to knock out the four pins holding two sections of the lattice boom together so that an additional section could be added. To gain better access to the pins, the helper ducked under the boom and began hammering them out from the inside.



Illustration by Don Lomax

The helper knocked out the first bottom pin, but when he knocked out the second bottom pin, the boom section, hinged on the two top pins, swung down and pinned the worker to the ground. There was no cribbing or blocking to prevent the free end of the boom from descending.

A hydraulic crane was brought in to lift the boom off the victim, and EMS personnel were called to the scene. But, resuscitation proved unsuccessful, and the carpenter's helper died shortly afterward.

## Recommendations:

- Always provide job specific (and machine specific) training to every individual on the site in a language they understand.
- Don't get in a hurry. Had the operator taken a half hour or so to find and place cribbing under

the boom, this accident could have been avoided. He should have also checked to ensure that boom pendants (suspension cables and lines) were properly located before removing a connecting pin.

- Don't skip daily safety meetings. If a supervisor can't make the meeting, have him arrange for a subordinate to conduct the meetings instead.
- Make sure that all workers are trained in all aspects of the job. The operator was trained to run the crane, but only partially knowledgeable about assembly/disassembly.
- Never attempt to disassemble crane boom sections from inside the lattice frame. Always stand outside the frame and give yourself plenty of room to move away if the boom drops.

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Date of safety talk: \_\_\_\_\_ Leader: \_\_\_\_\_  
Attending: \_\_\_\_\_