

An easy lift, a deadly fall

Everything seemed to be in order.

The victim was one of the company's most experienced and skilled crane operators, with 20 years of service at the company and additional experience in heavy equipment and trucking. He was wearing a hard hat and boots with non-slip soles. He wasn't carrying anything in his hands.

The 120-ton mobile crane was properly set up on a flat and level parking lot, with cribbing and outriggers for stability. The deck surface was free of oil, water and debris. Walking surfaces were coated with anti-slip materials. The crane was current on its inspections. The company had a dedicated safety officer who was also a crane operator. Safety meetings at this company were held monthly or whenever issues came up.

In preparation for lifting an HVAC unit to the top of a school building, the victim and an assistant attempted to put the telescoping boom into the hoisting mode. When the boom failed to move, the victim called the office for advice and was told to check the electrical panel. He and the helper checked the crane's control switch and determined the problem was indeed electrical. The company notified an electrician and told the victim and helper to wait.

The helper dismounted and was walking away from the crane when he heard the victim shout. While attempting to climb down from the deck of the crane, the victim apparently stumbled and fell 5 feet, head first, to the pavement. The victim was unconscious when help arrived and died days later in



Illustration by Don Lomax

the hospital.

Since the machine was up to code, and weather or circumstances were not a factor, it is likely the victim just lost his balance and/or stumbled as he attempted to climb off the machine. Given that the victim was 61 years old, this is the most likely scenario.

How this accident could have been prevented

- Evaluate the age and physical agility of your workers. Older workers may not have the balance, reflexes or eyesight of younger crew members. Take this into account when designing safety programs or access points to machines and make sure older workers are aware of their limitations.
- Train employees to use three points of contact at all times and to always face the machine when getting on or off equipment.
- Install handrails or grab points

whenever possible.

- Make sure steps or rungs are positioned for natural foot placement and wide enough for both feet.
- Keep steps uniform in size, shape and spacing. Something as small as a ¼-inch difference in the height of a step can cause somebody to stumble.
- Don't allow workers to jump off equipment. If workers are jumping, there is probably something wrong with the access design.
- Take the time to inspect the access points on all your equipment and solicit operators' and crew members' feedback. Identify tripping hazards and other deficiencies and work with the maintenance crews to engineer remedies.

For more information see: <http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Research/FACE/Files/CraneOperatorDeck-Fall.pdf>



Date of safety talk: _____ Leader: _____
 Attending: _____