

By Chip Pocock

# Qualifying and Documenting Riggers and Signalpersons

## What it takes to meet OSHA's requirements

**Y**our employees wear many hats. Defining an individual as an operator, rigger, or signalperson hasn't always been so clear cut. While the new OSHA Cranes and Derricks regulation draws some lines in the sand, it's your job as an employer to make sure your people can demonstrate their qualifications.

Is your company using the same riggers or signalpersons it was using a year ago? Are these workers any more or less qualified today just because OSHA requires them to be qualified? According to the regulation, if you're hooking, unhooking or guiding a load, and people are within the fall zone, the load must be rigged by a qualified rigger. Hopefully, your loads were *always* rigged by qualified riggers, and if your employees were qualified before, then they're probably qualified today. The difference now is that you have to show, in writing, that they are qualified. The same is true for signalpersons.

### What's it mean to be a qualified rigger?

In August 2004, when the C-DAC Committee finished its work, information about qualified riggers was not in the consensus document. But 2008 was a terrible year safety-wise in the crane industry when several high-profile fatalities occurred. So when OSHA finally issued the regulation in 2010, there were a few changes to the standard (17 to be exact)—one of which was the rigger qualification requirement. Ironically, the regulation does not say anything about training for a qualified rigger. Not one word. It simply says there has to be a qualified rigger and leaves it at that. But OSHA does define a qualified person as *one, who by possession of a recognized degree, certificate, or professional standing, or who by extensive knowledge, training and experience, has successfully demonstrated his ability to solve or resolve problems relating to the subject matter, the work, or the project.* It's important to note that the qualified rigger also appears in the Steel Erection Subpart R standard.

OSHA is not the only one with something to say about riggers. Both ANSI A10.42 and B30.9 standards contain specific requirements and qualifications for riggers. B30.9 requires training. Additionally, each section on various sling types says the people using slings described in the section must be thoroughly trained. *Wire rope sling users shall be trained in the selection, inspection, cautions to personnel, effects of environment, and rigging practices as covered in this Chapter.*

When A10.42 was in development, there was a great deal of



Chip Pocock is the safety and risk manager for Buckner Companies, Graham, N.C. He has served on various standard and regulatory committees, including the C-DAC committee to develop OSHA's new crane rule. He is also the safety committee chairman for the Steel Erectors Association of America. This article is excerpted from a presentation he made at the Crane & Rigging Conference held in Houston, Texas in July 2011. Chip Pocock can be reached at [chip@bucknercompanies.com](mailto:chip@bucknercompanies.com).

discussion about, *What is a rigger?* A rigger wears many different hats and performs many different tasks, from putting slings around a bundle of plywood to jacking, rolling, skating, and lifting with gantries and cranes. Obviously, different levels of proficiency are necessary depending on the job, so as an employer, you'll need to look at what your company does and what your riggers do and focus your training accordingly. *Personnel who are designated to operate rigging tools and equipment or perform work covered by this standard shall be qualified and trained to the level of proficiency consistent with assigned tasks.*

While A10.42 notes the need for basic skills—understanding spoken and written English, possessing calculation skills to calculate loads and load weights—it puts a great deal of emphasis on specific tasks. *Riggers shall be trained on the materials, methods, equipment, techniques, communication, and other items for their specific tasks.* In addition, the standard clearly states that it's the employer's job to ensure that the rigger has been suitably trained. *The employer or other entity responsible for supervising the lifting, hoisting, or movement of a load shall assess the knowledge, skills, and abilities of individuals designated as qualified riggers.* A10.42 notes that information from manufacturers can and should be incorporated into your training and talks about the need for updated training based on the use of new equipment and materials or unique loads.

### Rigger training

What does it all mean? The bottom line is, unless working under a government agency with its own requirements, employers should develop their own training programs, complete with testing, focusing on the specific tasks their riggers perform. Buckner is a steel erector and a crane rental house, so we focus on some very basic rigging skills that our employees do on a day-to-day basis, like sling inspection and finding the center of gravity of beams. Some of the employees who do assembly and disassembly have a little deeper knowledge and deeper training level. Buckner has two or three different training programs with written tests. Then we put those employees out in the field with their supervisors to put their classroom skills to practical use. We document that, give them a certificate, hard hat decal and a wallet card for the different levels of training. This does not mean they're

certified, but it meets the standards which say employer programs need to train to certain levels. Certification is great, but employees won't be able to achieve it without training.

To establish an in-house rigger training program, you should first perform a thorough task analysis of your work sites and specific employee duties to identify what training is appropriate for your people. Then take advantage of free resources that are available. OSHA has plenty of material in Subpart H on rigging. Tap into rigger training material available from your insurance carriers. Purchase the ANSI and ASME standards to use as training and reference material. The goal is to ensure your training program is complete with classroom time, practical experience, and testing.

## Testing options for signalpersons

Of course riggers are not the only workers on the job site whose qualifications are addressed by industry standards. How about your signalpersons? The OSHA Cranes and Derricks regulation provides definitive instructions on signalperson training and testing, and again, under 1926.1428(a) it's the employer's responsibility: *The employer of the signal person must ensure that each signal person meets the Qualification Requirements (paragraph (c) of this section) prior to giving any signals. This requirement must be met by using either Option (1) or Option (2) of this section.* What are those options?

Option 1 is a third-party qualified evaluator, or *an entity that, due to its independence and expertise, has demonstrated that it is competent in accurately assessing whether individuals meet the Qualification Requirements in this subpart for a signal person.* During C-DAC's development of the standard, Option 1 was intended to address various certifying bodies, such as the National Commission for the Certification of Crane Operators (NCCCO).

Option 2 is an employer's qualified evaluator or someone *employed by the signal person's employer who has demonstrated that he or she is competent in accurately assessing whether individuals meet the Qualification Requirements in this subpart for a signal person.*

Whichever option is used, the employer must document it, specifying each type of signal (hand signals, radio signals, etc.) for which

the signalperson meets the requirements, and have that documentation available at the job site while the signalperson is employed by the employer. It's important to note that Option 1 is portable, meaning an employee

### Some Resources for Certification

- Crane Institute Certification (CIC)
- National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER)
- National Commission for the Certification of Crane Operators (NCCCO)
- Operating Engineers Certification Program (OCEP)

can take the NCCCO signalperson card and move from employer to employer. Option 2 is not portable, but only valid while an individual is with that particular company.

## Elements of good signalperson training

Whoever is doing your signalperson training should be heavily involved in the crane and rigging industry. He or she should have had experience with boom deflection and dynamic loading, and first-hand knowledge that an operator can't stop a load on a dime. Trainers

need to have had experience working at the end of a hook and maybe also in the seat of the crane to truly understand what happens when you're coming around and some guy says, *STOP*.

My opinion is that the new regulation has opened the floodgates for every safety consultant in the country to provide signalperson training and certification. But from personal experience, knowledge gained on the job site is essential to thorough, quality training. As with rigger training, testing is an essential part of the process. The good news is, you don't need to go out in the field and set up a crane to do practical exams. Many training resources contain practical exams right on the CD, allowing the candidate to view an image and perform the correct signals for the situation.

Finally, if you're currently doing in-house signalperson training and you're not doing a documented oral or written test as well as a practical test, you're not in compliance with the standard. Once training is complete, you can take it to the next level—certification, although it is not required. One more point regarding certification. All types of certifications are not created equal. You may have a crane operator who is certified through one of the certifying bodies, such as the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER), or the NCCCO. That does not mean the employee is a certified signalperson. While the crane operator exams may contain some questions on hand signals, the testing portion is not at the level required for meeting requirements for qualified signalpersons. For that you should have employees take an exam specifically for signalpersons. If you are using long-time, experienced crane operators and riggers to do signaling and OSHA shows up, these employees had better have separate signalperson training with cards in their pockets to prove it.

When training is completed and employees are ready for the work site, the job is still not complete. The signalperson and operator need to get together and communicate about how the operator likes to get signals and how the signals will be given. All the training and exams won't be worth much if this simple, but essential step is skipped and there's a miscommunication leading to accident or injury.

So we've covered the employer's obligation when it comes to qualification and certification, but what about crane rental companies? Are crane rental companies expected to be the police officers of the industry? The answer is No. There is nothing in the OSHA regulation that puts the burden on a crane owner or crane operator. But obviously, the rental company's operator should get together with the signalperson to determine the means of communication, be it hand signals or radio. For an added layer of protection, it might be a good idea to have a statement on the rental ticket that says the people flagging your crane are trained and qualified in accordance with 1400 Subpart (c)(c) and that the rigging will be done by qualified riggers in accordance with B30 or A10—and then get the ticket signed by the customer.

There are thousands of workers on site today who may not have cards in their pockets. That's not to say they're not qualified. They may very well be qualified but their training isn't documented. There are plenty of resources out there to help you comply with the standards. Even if you consider your employees the best in the business, it's your job to see that they're properly trained, tested, and qualified, and that the training is documented, so OSHA knows your people are the best in the business, too. ■