

The interview

Rob Weiss on New York, the US and the EU

Tower cranes

Terex factory tour—Tower crane training—
Wolff at work in London

Australia

Pipelines and politics—Job map



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Making a difference

This month's interviewee, Rob Weiss, has taken an active role in crane safety, helping develop the new US federal crane rule, and speaking out against excessive and incoherent legislation.

He told me how a comment of his at an SC&RA meeting in 2008 led to the formation of an international working group on crane standards. The group's first job has been to try to develop a consensus on the different approaches taken to the override key on mobile cranes, exemplified by the transatlantic row over the revised EU mobile crane standard, EN13000:2010.

Weiss is a good example of the sense of vocational duty common to the industry: individuals who don't just think about cranes as their day job, but who devote substantial amounts of time and effort to developing new standards or advocating for responsible regulation. It doesn't end there. Every year, organisations like the SC&RA, ESTA and CICA get together to develop new skills, share experiences, and build a common front in the fight for safe lifting. The actions they take with their members' support, pushes the industry's safety agenda forward.

As we talked about the work being done on EN13000:2010, Weiss raised one way EU owners and operators can play a part in developing standards.

Last year, the world crane experts group that Weiss played such an important role in setting up, came up with a consensus position on mobile crane override keys. Under the so-called

'Amsterdam consensus', operators would have access to an override key allowing them to use the crane at full speed even if the load limiter had been triggered, but would then have to reset the crane, using a switch outside the cab and a key held by a supervisor, before resuming normal operations. The Amsterdam consensus meets European concerns about misuse of the override key, and calms American fears that ops might be prevented from rapidly booming down in emergency situations.

While this position was agreed by some of the best minds in the industry, taking in both crane owners and manufacturers, when the FEM brought it to the EU for a proposed revision to EN13000:2010, it was rejected. Now, through ESTA and the FEM, owners and operators of post-EN13000:2010 cranes are being surveyed, to find out if they feel cranes built to the new standard are safer. The results will be used in a new approach to the EU.

You can download the survey at www.esta-eu.org. Take the time to consider the effect the new standard has on the safety of your crane operations. By taking part in this survey, you won't just be helping regulators understand the effects of the revision to EN13000, you'll be playing an important part in efforts to harmonise standards and allow a healthy transatlantic trade in used cranes.

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Getting involved

As well as helping run his family's two businesses, Rob Weiss has taken a leading role in developing crane standards, both in the US and around the world. He spoke to Will North

For his two day jobs, Rob Weiss is vice president of Cranes, Inc., a crane hire company, and of steel erectors A J McNulty & Co. A J McNulty is the older of the two companies, established in 1925 by the eponymous Mr McNulty and Weiss's grandfather, Paul Weiss. Seeing the demand for cranes in their work as steel erectors, the two men set up their own hire firm. Paul Weiss took over running the businesses in the 1950s. His son, Lawrence, took in the 1970s, and still works for both companies. Rob joined in 1992.

Weiss's work in the industry doesn't end with his role in these businesses. He was one of the group of experts that helped draw up US federal regulator OSHA's new crane rule. In New York, he has been a key advocate for the industry as local legislators push for tough local crane laws. Internationally, he has helped bridge the gap between EU and US approaches to crane safety, forming a working group based on disagreement over the new EU mobile standard EN 13000.

That last role came about by accident, Weiss explains: "I have a very close relationship with Liebherr, having pioneered a number of their models in the United States. We send our mechanics over to Ehingen every year for training, and I go too. It's not that I'm going to be in the yard pulling wrenches with them, but when they come to me and say they need a new part, I like to know what they are talking about. So I go and do the same training programmes.

"I was there in December 2007, and one of Liebherr's sales team pulled me aside, and said changes to the LMI were coming, that there would be no override key and that the speed of operational functions would be reduced to 15% in override situations.

"At the next meeting of the SC&RA Crane and Rigging Group Governing Committee, in January 2008 in Maui, they

asked if anyone had any new business. I raised my hand and said, 'I assume you all know about these changes to the LMI, about the override key?' They all looked at me like I had three heads. There were manufacturers there, as well as all the major U.S. rental companies, and no one knew. We decided to start a working group, and, as I'd raised the issue, I was chosen to head it.

"The feeling here, amongst owners and operators, is that if you can't have full speed during override, it is a safety disaster."

Arguments over approaches to safety have had a more immediate affect in Weiss's local market. "New York City has a very interesting set of crane rules," Weiss says, "NYC had crane regulations in the late 1960s, even before OSHA was founded [in 1971]."

"People would build cranes, and derricks in particular, in their backyard. So, the city made a requirement that every crane model entering New York had to be prototyped. That meant drawing up a plan of the crane and passing it to an independent engineer, who was required to review and approve the engineering and submit it to the City for their approval.

"That worked well into the 1980s and 1990s. Every crane in the city would carry a single plate with the load chart used for the approval. The problem came with the introduction of all terrain cranes, with multiple outrigger positions and boom and counterweight configurations, generating thousands of pages of load charts. These ultra-sophisticated cranes are designed by engineering teams of 30 or 40 people, using computer-aided design. Now, the engineer's office in New York (generally Howard Shapiro & Associates) has to review the work of all those engineers. It is a daunting task."

For companies like Cranes, Inc., those rules make it hard to innovate, Weiss

says: "I have had a brand new Liebherr LTM 1350-6.1 since August, and it is just sitting in the yard looking pretty while it waits for City approval." For companies wanting to enter the market in New York, the prototype rules, licensing requirements, and the need to employ ops and oilers from IUOE Locals 14 and 15, mean it rarely makes sense to bring in a crane from outside the city.

Now, New York City, prompted by two serious accidents, is pushing for a new, more stringent, set of regulations. The Steel Institute of New York, representing the city's steel erectors, has gone to court to try to block the new rules, using the same arguments (and legal team) that overturned similar regulations in Miami Dade.

Weiss says, "The Steel Institute of New York case against New York City's crane rules raises the issue of whether Federal law supersedes and pre-empts municipal regulations covering the same subject matter. The original legislation that created OSHA said that states could establish their own worker safety rules, such as crane regulations, if they adopted a federally approved State Plan. The question raised in the SINY case is whether municipalities can circumvent and bypass the requirements imposed by Congress upon the states. The preamble to the new OSHA cranes and derricks rule, says it is perfectly possible for cities and local municipalities (not states) to write their own crane rules in building codes, as long as they don't conflict with the OSHA rule.

"SINY has asked for time to study the new standard. When Congress established OSHA, it said that if there is a worker safety issue, it should be covered federally.

"If you follow the logic of OSHA's preamble to the crane rule, and every municipality of 500 people writes its own rules, how are you going to manage that?" ■