



SPECIAL INVESTIGATORS – BEHIND THE SCENES IN UNSAFE WORKPLACES

Reality TV series Special Investigators follows workplace health and safety inspectors for the Department of Labour as they investigate the hazards people can encounter in the workplace.

Crane Rope Break

During work on a construction site at a Christchurch shopping mall a crane was being used to move heavy steel beams. One worker escaped with minor injuries after the crane rope snapped and a half tonne steel beam fell to the ground.

The injured worker had been operating the crane's controls when the rope snapped, dropping the beam.

A fellow worker, watching the operation, saw the beam fall on his co-worker's shoulder following a loud bang. He was thrown to the ground and saved from being crushed only because the beam caught a nearby object.

A Department of Labour inspector was called to the scene and the resulting investigation was critical to protect other workers, as a fatality had been a distinct possibility.

The inspector noticed that a warning mechanism on the crane had been disabled. A weight was missing from the end of the mechanism and the rope had been tied off for safe keeping. When working, this mechanism sounds an alarm if the hook gets too close to the boom and there is danger of the rope snapping. The incident was exactly what the disabled device was designed to prevent.

A prohibition notice was placed on the crane to ensure it wasn't used until the warning mechanism has been repaired.

There were also concerns with the general work procedures on the job. Contrary to industry guidelines, the injured worker was guiding the crane's load by standing directly underneath.

'Safety must not be seen as an add-on, but integrated into top level of the organisation.'

Though management had expected staff to use tag-lines in this situation, which allows workers to steady loads from a distance, the Department reminded the company that the

Courts have been very clear on this issue. Workers must comply with expectations and guidelines.

Further investigations revealed that the crane's annual certification was not up to date and no certification had been issued since its original installation five years earlier. The company replaced the dangerous crane but the replacement was probably more dangerous than the one involved in the recent incident, and a prohibition notice was issued on the second crane.

The Department was soon convinced that the contractor was not taking their safety obligations seriously enough. Even after a potentially serious incident that narrowly avoided a fatality, the company returned the same untrained operator to the job, providing him again with unsafe and uncertified equipment.

The Department proceeded with prosecution and after hearing the evidence provided by the Department's investigation, the Judge imposed a fine of \$12,000 on the company for the use of unsafe cranes and an untrained operator.

Key learnings

- Always use a trained and certified operator for all machinery and equipment.
- Always follow or exceed industry standard inspection and maintenance practices for all equipment used on the job.
- Ensure a competent person is in charge of construction operations at all time.
- Warning mechanisms and safety alarms are always on machines for a reason. Never disable a warning mechanism on tools or machinery.

More information

Download and read the Approved Code of Practice for Cranes.

For general advice on workplace health and safety call 0800 20 90 20.

Health and Safety
IT'S NO JOKE.

newzealand.govt.nz

Department of Labour
TE TARI MAHI

