



International Association of

Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers

SUITE 400

1750 NEW YORK AVE., N.W.

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006

Affiliated with AFL-CIO



STEVEN L RANK

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

1750 NEW YORK AVENUE, NW

WASHINGTON, DC 20006

OFFICE: 202.383.4829

FAX: 202.383.6490

CELL: 916.752.2581

EMAIL: srank@iwinrl.org

July 28, 2014

Mr. Eric Berg
Acting Principal Safety Engineer
Research and Standards Unit
Division of Occupational Safety and Health
1515 Clay Street Suite 1901
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Mr. Berg:

I am writing to request the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) Research and Standards Unit to provide clarification regarding the use of electronic transmission (radio or hard-wire phone) verbal crane signals during the steel erection process. It is my understanding that a general contractor and crane operator in Southern California are refusing to agree with the signal person and lift director on the use of standard verbal (voice) crane signals during the steel erection process.

The Ironworkers International Union representing the Ironworkers, and the Western Steel Council representing the steel erection contractors want to express our concern that this situation creates serious safety hazards to Ironworkers during the hoisting and placing of structural steel members. Given the serious nature of situation, we are requesting DOSH to intervene and provide written clarification on the duty of all parties (crane operator, signal person and lift director) to agree to uniform verbal crane signals that are required by the following standard.

§ 1926.1421 Signals—voice signals—additional requirements.

- (a) Prior to beginning operations, the operator, signal person and lift director (if there is one), must contact each other and agree on the voice signals that will be used. Once the voice signals are agreed upon, these workers need not meet again to discuss voice signals unless another worker is added or substituted, there is confusion about the voice signals, or a voice signal is to be changed.
- (b) Each voice signal must contain the following three elements, given in the following order: function (such as hoist, boom, *etc.*), direction; distance and/or speed; function, stop command.
- (c) The operator, signal person and lift director (if there is one), must be able to effectively communicate in the language used.

The use of standard electronic verbal crane signals has been used safely for many decades throughout California. The “phone man (signal person)” who transmits verbal signals to the crane operator is a highly qualified person who specializes in providing verbal signals to safety hoist and place structural members. Steel erection activities must not begin until these parties to agree to verbal crane signals.

The International Association and Western steel Council strongly opposes the position of this particular general contractor and crane operator who are refusing to agree with the signal person and lift director on the use of standard electronic verbal (voice) crane signals during the steel erection process. To reiterate, it is our belief that such instances create serious hazards to Ironworkers, who in many cases are




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Page 2

“working in the blind” and must rely on the expertise, coordination, and consistent use of verbal (voice) crane signals for their safety.

Question #1: Does the DOSH Research and Standards Unit uphold the above referenced standard that all parties must “agree on the voice signals that will be used”?

Question #2: Does the DOSH Research and Standards Unit recognize the potential hoisting and rigging safety hazards as described above, and agree that the commencement of steel erection activities must be halted until such time that all parties comply with the above referenced standard and “agree on the voice signals that will be used”?

Question #3: Can the DOSH compliance personnel issue a citation to any party who refuses to comply with the above referenced standard and refuses to agree with standard voice crane signals?

Question #4: Given the nature of potential crane hoisting and rigging hazards during the steel erection process, could DOSH issue an “Order Prohibiting Use” (OPU) until all parties agree with the above referenced standard and agree on the use of standard voice crane signals?

I appreciate your efforts to review the applicable crane verbal (voice) standards and duty for all parties to comply. We have established a meeting this Wednesday at 3:00 pm with the general contractor to express our safety issues and request their cooperation for the crane operator, signal person, and lift director to agree to common crane verbal (voice) signals in accordance with the above standard. It is our position that this issue warrants the DOSH’s immediate attention.

I look forward to your response in the near future.

Sincerely,

Steven L. Rank
Executive Director of Safety and Health
Ironworkers International Union

C: Juliann Sum, Acting Chief, California DOSH

Eric Dean, General Secretary, Iron Workers International

Joe Standley, President, California District Council of Ironworkers

Mike Silvey, Business Manager, Ironworkers Local 433, Los Angeles, CA

Johnny Galvan, Business Manager, Ironworkers Local 229 San Diego, CA

Greg McClelland, Executive Director, Western Steel Council

Russell McCrary, Safety Director, Safety Institute