

Let's work to make rigging sites safer!

By Dennis St. Germain

Performing any kind of onsite fabrication work in a safe, efficient and insured environment is the primary responsibility of the rigger, so that any unforeseen mishaps can be avoided.

I have been working in this industry for fifty years beginning in 1959 as a wire rope hand splicer fabricating chokers sold to iron workers. During the interim period I became a company owner supplying all types of rigging gear including slings to every conceivable rigging operation in many areas of the world. Needless to say I have interfaced with riggers who have been involved in every imaginable heavy lift operation in utility plants, refineries, shipyards, and construction sites, off-shore drilling, mining, and industrial plants.

The one thing all of these rigging sites have in common is a desire to perform the work safely and as efficiently as possible. This is not only the primary goal of the onsite riggers responsible for the hands on portion of the job, but also that of the safety directors and managers accountable for the overall performance of their company.

Recently several major rigging accidents have occurred that made news headlines around the world. In New York City, Houston, Miami, and Wyoming lives were lost, again calling our attention to the importance of safety during rigging operations. Who and what was to blame in these horrid accidents is yet to be determined but we can nevertheless review some of the basics to be considered for all rigging jobs going forward.

First and foremost it is my belief that the riggers on site must be in direct communication with the company fabricating the rigging gear being used. It does not matter how the gear is purchased, whether through a purchasing department or an integrated supplier, the responsible fabricator must be known by the rigger in the field and identified. The fabricator



must go through a process to qualify them for the contractual relationship that includes a facility inspection, evaluation of their registered ISO quality control program, testing machine records, and identification of their resources for furnishing associated hardware. The selected fabricator must provide proof of liability insurance for the products they make and sell. Also important to the riggers is availability of 24/7 service to meet emergency situations, and length of time for standard deliveries.

The fabricator selected must be able to help the end user with appropriate rigging plans that incorporate the latest innovations available that can improve efficiency and safety. The fabricator selected should be asked to provide training programs to educate the riggers in the selection, inspection, use, and care of their rigging tools including cranes, slings, and fittings. They must have qualified people to provide on-site inspections when asked. If you think the

following are all related to airplanes, then you need more information on rigging: B-17; B-25; B-29; B-30.

Many sling products sold today help lower the cost of the overall rigging bill because they can be repaired, proof-tested, and returned to service at a small fraction of the new replacement price. A service like this and on-site inspections by a qualified inspector are another of the advantages associated with pre-selection of a rigging fabricator.

All rigging products for below the hook connections should be delivered with a certificate indicating the manufacturer, the proof-test, date, rated capacity, and a serial number. The gear should be tagged to match the appropriate certificates so accurate inspection records can be maintained. Products purchased at random from multiple sources may have different and confusing paper work that will make traceability and inspection a real nightmare.

Today we have a global economy



and rigging gear is fabricated and transported from one country to another on a regular basis. In the USA many of the synthetic slings used by riggers are produced in Asia. Unfortunately, although these may be of good quality, the tagging including the country of origin and the fabricators name may not be evident to the end user. It is my opinion that the rigger, the safety director, the purchasing department, and the integrated supplier should all know where the rigging gear originates, and have an opportunity to approve the source before it is delivered. When difficulties arise on a jobsite there should be no surprises regarding the origin of rigging gear.

Riggers usually have the opportunity to input their wishes into purchasing of particular gear, but many times what they ask for is much different than what they finally receive. For example, there are many types of slings that will lift 100 tons, all sold at different prices and all with different costs when used. The cheapest sling on the market may end up being the most expensive for the rigger to actually complete the work. Extra handling equipment, people, storage area, transportation costs and functionality may all add up to the most expensive job possible just to save a few bucks up front. It should be assumed if a rigger responsible for a heavy lift specifies a certain product; they have done their homework and selected a product that will provide benefits in safety and efficiency that

will conclude the job at the lowest overall cost.

If rigging gear is purchased at random from many suppliers holding no one fabricator directly responsible for training, service, quality, availability, and planning advice, the main sufferer is the rigger in the field who has to do their job without a foundation of necessary resources and support. When a technical question arises regarding the gear just who would the rigger call if no one was designated as the primary source?

Moving forward I would make the rigger in the field, who is held responsible for the safe and efficient completion of a heavy lift, one of the main parties responsible for the selection of the provider of rigging gear. I would listen to the riggers requirements for appropriate gear and be sure the purchase order does not substitute a different product. I would be sure to qualify the fabricator and direct all purchases through that single source even if placed through an integrated supplier. I would never allow an outside party to decide on rigging fabricators for my job site or purchase rigging gear without knowing who was responsible for the fabrication.

When planning a rigging job the main caveat besides safety is “no surprises”. Nothing should be left to chance so the outcome is known and assured before the first lift is performed. That being said, then the source of all of the rigging gear

should be primary in the minds of the safety director, managers, and riggers. Input into the appropriate source should be by a committee of the responsible parties. A good cook would never try to make a delicious meal without using quality ingredients. The outcome is only as good as the input.

There are many corporations that have selected rigging gear fabricators after careful evaluations and will not allow any other rigging products on their premises whether the work is performed by their own workers or an outside contractor. They have taken a direct interest in a safe and sure outcome and are keenly aware of the responsible fabricator. All below the hook rigging products are delivered with the appropriate tag and certificates. Riggers do not have to guess about the rated capacity, the fabricators name, and the country of origin, the material type, or the serial number.

Do not put barriers and blockades between the field riggers and the source of their rigging gear. The invoicing for products, inspection and training, or whatever is required can be placed through any channel dictated by corporate, but the direct communication between the end user and the fabricator is paramount to safety and efficiency. Any corporation with an interest in accountability for their rigging gear could easily establish a plan and co-ordinate



their requirements so everyone from the field rigger to the fabricator could work as partners in a structured setting.

When riggers in the field are faced with questions about the suitability of a product for continued use, or in a particular chemical environment, or at a certain temperature, they need instant access to their responsible fabricator. Web sites with accurate technical resources and toll free connections to product advisors from a designated source are paramount to efficiency and safety.

When accident investigations conclude that rigging gear on site came from several sources and different countries, it is a sure sign the riggers

had little input into the purchasing decision. It is a sure sign that there was little direction from management or safety into the purchasing decisions. And if this all comes as a surprise to everyone involved it is a sure sign they abdicated their responsibility for rigging safety or did not realize how important it is to qualify a fabricator in advance.

If several fabricators provide rigging gear from several countries, then who provides the appropriate training for the selection, care, use, and inspection? I think after my fifty years of associating with riggers in the field they would acknowledge the wisdom of what is said here and welcome it as a breath of fresh air. I also

hope this article awakens managers and safety directors to a better path going forward.

It has been said you cannot put a price on safety and the cost of an accident in wasted resources, injuries, deaths, property damage, lawsuits, and lost time far outweighs a structured approach to the purchase and implementation of rigging gear.

Let's leave nothing to chance and let's have no surprises!

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