



CICA – Vic / Tas Branch Crane Safety Bulletin #361 May 2025



Greetings all. Today's Bulletin is about **the importance of critical thinking in crane safety: understanding the context of rules.**

Crane safety is governed by a comprehensive set of rules and regulations designed to protect operators, riggers, and bystanders.

These rules are essential for maintaining a safe working environment; however, they are often written by regulatory bodies, engineers, or safety professionals who may not always have firsthand experience operating cranes in the field.

This brings us to the statement by [Ellen Langer](#): "*The more different you are from the person who wrote the rule, the more important it is to not mindlessly follow the rule.*"

It's worth watching [her talk](#), because this idea is particularly relevant in crane safety, as it underscores the necessity of applying critical thinking and situational awareness when interpreting and implementing safety guidelines.

The Context of Rules in Crane Safety

Rules and procedures are often formulated based on standardised conditions, ideal scenarios, and past incidents.

However, real world crane operations are highly dynamic, involving varying environmental conditions, terrain challenges, and equipment limitations.

Operators and riggers, who experience these challenges firsthand, may find that some rules require adaptation to be effectively applied in their specific context.

For example, a rule dictating a specific outrigger placement might have been written with flat, stable ground in mind.

However, if a crane operator is working on uneven terrain or in a congested urban setting, following this rule without considering the immediate surroundings could create additional hazards.

In these cases, an experienced operator must assess the situation critically and make necessary adjustments while still maintaining compliance with the core safety principles.

The Danger of Blind Compliance

Mindlessly following a rule without understanding its intent can lead to unsafe practices. Crane operators

must recognise that rules are developed based on certain assumptions, which may not always align with the specific conditions of a job site.

For instance, a lifting procedure that works well for one type of crane may not be suitable for another due to differences in load capacities, counterweights, or boom configurations. If an operator blindly adheres to a rule without considering these factors, it could result in structural failures, tipping incidents, or load instability.

A critical example of this occurred in incidents where operators followed outdated or one-size-fits-all lifting guidelines, leading to accidents because they did not adjust for wind speeds, ground conditions, or specific crane limitations.

It is essential to interpret the rules through the lens of practical experience and current conditions rather than strictly adhering to them without question.

Balancing Compliance with Judgment

While it is essential to follow established safety regulations, professionals in the crane industry must also develop the ability to think critically and apply their knowledge to real-world scenarios.

Training should emphasise not just rule following but also risk assessment and decision-making skills.

A well-trained crane operator understands when and how to modify procedures to maintain safety without disregarding the fundamental principles behind regulations.

And everyone on your team needs to understand the importance of not blindly following rules when personal experience and on-the-ground realities suggest a need for adaptation.

Crane operators must respect the intent behind safety regulations while also using their expertise to ensure that rules are applied effectively in varying circumstances.

How can you foster a culture of critical thinking and situational awareness, so that your workplace is one that enhances safety and operational efficiency while maintaining compliance with essential guidelines.

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