

# 09/98 Cranes free falling loads

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### Incident

On 8 June 1998 at Port Hedland, a rigger was dogging a lifting frame full of scaffold tubes and planks from a level 43 metres above ground level when the entire load fell. The load was well slung and had been lifted to a position of approximately 10 metres clear of the landing, when at that moment someone at ground level approached the operator of the 4600 Manitowoc Tower Crane. A few minutes later the load free fell onto a handrail and deflected onto the rigger and caused a fractured right AC joint together with some local damage to the handrailing. Several tubes also fell 43 metres to the ground, but fortunately did not injure anyone or cause any further damage.

Following a hearing, the crane operator was suspended from operating this type of crane for one month. The suspension would have been more severe, but for the fact that the person that approached the operator, did so, without first gaining agreement from the operator.

Similar outcomes have also occurred around Perth during the past 12 months involving other pin jib cranes. Several of these incidents have also resulted in action being taken against the crane operator.

### Factors

The operator was distracted by a fellow worker in the vicinity of the crane cabin and, as he went to resume the lift after a brief interruption, he:

- a. depressed the deadman control button; and
- b. pulled the boom hoist lever thinking all the time that the auxiliary hoist brake was still applied, but this was not the case. The result was that the load free fell.

During a hearing into the incident, it was learnt that similar incidents have occurred elsewhere throughout the world and now in Europe and some state of America, modifications have been made to these cranes to prevent the free falling of loads.

The auxiliary hoist brake latch was disengaged by the operator when distracted.

### Recommendations

1. That all 3900, 4100 and 4600 series Manitowoc cranes be fitted with an automatic drum hoist brake system (also called AUTOTROL Hoist Systems) or similar unit, and that other lattice boom type cranes not fitted with a positive drive winch, that still allows the free falling of loads, also be modified.
2. That workers not climb on a crane without first gaining the attention and agreement of the crane operator.
3. That crane operators generally not allow another worker to approach a crane or distract them from the safe operation of a crane while a load is suspended.



4. Supervisors of projects engaging crane drivers must ensure that all crane operators are familiar with the crane they are required to operate before any load is raised. This is particularly important for operators that predominantly operate hydraulic cranes and may not be familiar with a crane that has a "live hook", free fall capability.
5. Main contractors should seriously consider only allowing cranes on site that do not have a free fall capacity.

## Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site [www.worksafe.wa.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.wa.gov.au), or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: [safety@docep.wa.gov.au](mailto:safety@docep.wa.gov.au).

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