

AN EMPLOYER'S GUIDE TO THE OSHA FINAL RULE: **CRANE OPERATOR CERTIFICATION**



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Most employers are likely familiar with the crane operator qualification requirements OSHA published in 2010. The latest Rule published in November modifies some of those. Here, NCCCO provides an overview of the essential elements.

What do I have to do to ensure my operators are qualified?

There are three (3) essential components to this process. You must ensure that each of your operators is trained, certified (or licensed), and evaluated.

What if I have operators who are not yet certified?

They are classified as “operators-in-training” and can operate under supervision and with certain restrictions (see 1926.1427(b)(2) thru (4)).

Are any cranes exempt from this requirement?

Operators of derricks, sideboom cranes, or equipment with a maximum manufacturer-rated hoisting/lifting capacity of 2,000 pounds or less are not required to have certified operators. However, your responsibility to train still applies (*see separate document: An Employer's Guide to Crane Operator Training*).

What if I work as a contractor to the military?

This Rule still applies to you. Military qualifications apply only to military employees, i.e. federal employees of the Department of Defense or Armed Forces.

What about my operators who work in states that require a license? Do they have to be certified also?

The state license should suffice so long as the state program meets or exceeds OSHA's requirements; that is the licensing authority's responsibility. In any case, it's likely that your operators got NCCCO certification as a condition of obtaining their state license.

Who pays for the certification and/or license?

You do. It wasn't certain in the 2010 Rule, but OSHA made that very clear in this latest Rule.

Can I get certification for my employees from anyone?

No! The issuing entity (e.g. NCCCO) must be accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency (such as ANSI or NCCA) so as to be sure that industry-recognized criteria for written testing materials, practical examinations, test administration, grading, facilities/equipment, and personnel have been met.

Does certification have to be according to the capacity of the crane or just by type?

Certification does *not* have to be by capacity. In fact, OSHA has stated that in all of its research it found no additional safety benefit for certifying by anything other than type of crane, and it would impose a huge financial burden on employers unnecessarily if the capacity of the crane were included.

Is certification a one-time event?

No. OSHA requires that operators recertify every five (5) years. They recognize that “certification for life” would not allow for operators to be periodically tested to ensure they have retained essential safety knowledge and are up to speed with the latest regulatory and technical developments. In any case, accrediting bodies require certification organizations to have a recertification component to their programs.

What do the operator tests have to cover?

OSHA is pretty specific about that and has listed what it regards as essential knowledge and skills listed in paragraphs (j)(1) and (2) of 1926.1427.

What if there is no certification available for a specific type of crane?

NCCCO has developed accredited certification programs for a wide variety of cranes, but it's simply not feasible to cover every single type. In those cases, OSHA has said that if no accredited testing agency offers certification for a particular type of equipment, an operator will be deemed to have complied with its certification requirements if the operator has been certified for the type of crane that is "most similar."

How I determine what type of crane is "most similar"?

As a service to industry, NCCCO last year assembled a group of crane industry experts to address this very issue. The Crane Type Advisory Group (CTAG), referenced by OSHA in the Preamble to the Final Rule, has made several determinations as to what type is "most similar" to cranes for which a certification program is not available. A national database of these determinations will be published shortly. In the meantime, requests for determination can be sent to cranetype@nccco.org.

Do I have to use certification programs developed by an accredited certification organization or can I develop my own?

You can develop your own program, but it must meet essentially the same development, management and test administration requirements of a certification program from a third-party organization. And it must be audited by someone who is certified to evaluate such programs by an accredited crane operator testing organization. The requirements are laid out in 1926.1427(e).

What if I have operators that don't understand English?

OSHA allows tests to be administered in any language the operator understands. However, it comes with conditions: The operator is only permitted to operate cranes equipped with operations manuals and load charts that are written in the language of the certification (which must be stated on the certification card), and he/she must be able to effectively communicate with the signal person and lift director in the language used.

See also related documents:

Crane Operator Evaluation: An Employer's Guide

Crane Operator Training: An Employer's Guide

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