

Playing it Safe

The potential of a Marie Antoinette style guillotine execution taking place on a South African industrial site and making the headlines is huge. A large steel plate falling from height onto someone below and causing serious injury or even death is a very real threat, unless somebody does something about the inferior lifting equipment being used all over the country every day.



Peter Turchetti

Bulk Handling Today" speaks to Peter Turchetti, a director of Elephant Lifting Equipment in Centurion who says, "The fight against non-conforming lifting equipment flooding the South African market is intensifying."

"We, the suppliers who conform to the requirements of safety critical lifting equipment, are not only waging a battle against the ignorance of some end-users, we're also competing against the very low prices at which non-compliant equipment is coming into the country.

not. Although we are making some progress in informing end-users, it's far too slow to stem the tide against the influx of inferior equipment.

"Management and purchasing staff tend to forget that the onus of purchasing and using lifting equipment that complies with prescribed quality, technical and safety standards lies with them," he explains. "Company owners mistakenly think that the person who handles the equipment is responsible.

The onus

"A large corporate company, for example, may very well be aware of the legal requirements and even have a safety policy in place, but this does not necessarily filter down to the hundreds of contractors and sub-contractors who do work for them. "The reality of the matter is that if something goes wrong and somebody is hurt or killed, the corporate, as the owner of the company, will be held responsible and not the person, or contractor using the equipment," stresses Peter.

"It's therefore essential for the owner of the company to make sure that every contractor and subcontractor is fully aware of the legal requirements for quality as well as conforming to the various manufacturing standards available in South Africa." These include applicable South African National Standards (SANS) published by the Standards Division of the SABS

Remember, what goes up must come down.....

Unscrupulous suppliers

"Unfortunately the cost pressures on the South African industry mean that non-compliant imports have become increasingly attractive, especially when you have a growing number of unscrupulous suppliers who are preying on an uninformed user base," Peter adds. "Even prestigious construction companies and fabricators are often not well enough informed to know what complies and what does



The real thing, lifting clamps clearly marked with all the necessary details to trace it back to the manufacturer

Lifting steel plates are like lifting guillotine blades into the air

and/or other international standards such as ISO and EN (European Norm). In the case of engineered and fabricated lifting equipment products, where an item is custom-made for a specific lifting application, prescribed best-practice engineering standards also apply, in addition to published quality standards,

there was nothing else we could use to trace the manufacturer, never mind the standards to which the clamp was made and verified."

Boomerang

Similarly, a manufactured lifting device such as a lifting beam or spreader beam has to be designed and engineered properly in certified engineering steps, otherwise it is doomed to fail. To prove his point, Peter shows us photos of a beam bent into the shape of a boomerang within just a few weeks of use on site. The caption across it says, 'Beware, bad design can boomerang on you...!'

Remember, what goes up must come down.....

"It's immediately clear that these beams were not designed by an engineer, they obviously just had a boilermaker weld together steel plate to look more or less like a lifting beam," says Peter. "The beams we manufacture, for example, are each accompanied by paper work with the design engineer's signed-off drawing, a certificate indicating the standard to which it was designed, material certificates, the welder's competence certificate and a certificate proving it has been tested."

Marking and traceability

Although compliant equipment does cost more, the user not only has the benefit of operating legally, but he's assured of a better quality product that is likely to outlast the cheap one ten times anyway. "A simple guideline is that each piece of lifting

where these exist. It is important to buy and use only equipment that is supplied with a 'Manufacturers Certificate of Conformance.'

Clamp example

"Compliance with any of these standards is a key factor today as well as meeting those requirements of the various statutory acts, such as the OSH Act and MHS Act and their regulations such as the Driven Machinery and Construction Regulations of the OHS Act," says Peter. "Any lifting environment, whether it's underground or on a construction site, is inherently dangerous. If companies don't start with the right equipment, made to the right design standards, they're in trouble already. Mine management should also ensure that written procedures covering the use, care, maintenance and quality requirements are implemented and maintained."

However, the problem starts when construction and fabrication companies rely on their contractors to do the right thing by complying with these standards. "Lifting steel plates are like lifting guillotine blades into the air. Can you imagine the consequences if the load comes down on people working below it?" asks Peter. "Just such a clamp was brought to us for repairs the other day from a huge construction development up north. Apart from the clamp having a non-existent supplier's name plate on it,



The plate lifting clamp that failed. It has no manufacturer marking or any traceable specification on it

equipment has to be traceable all the way back to the manufacturer and even as far back as the batch of material that was used to make it," Peter says in conclusion.

"Therefore, each piece of equipment must not only bear the name of the manufacturer, a serial number, its capacity and so on, but most importantly, customers should only buy approved brands from approved suppliers who have the infrastructure in place to trace equipment all the way back to origin."

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