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**Al Jaber Heavy Lift**
Safely onwards and upwards
Cranes Asia Singapore 2009
on 9th & 10th December, 2009 at the
Shangri-La Hotel
Singapore
Al Jaber Heavy Lift
EVENT PARTNER
Keynote address by
Alan Dunn
www.ajhl.com

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

It is an honour for me to be here at the first Cranes Today conference in Singapore, and I would like to add my welcome to you all on behalf of the event partner,

Al Jaber Heavy Lift.

Indeed, it's a pleasure for me to welcome you to this delightful venue, the Shangri-La Hotel with whom Al Jaber have had a long association as owners of two of their hotels in the Middle East.

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Cranes Today magazine have asked me to focus my keynote speech on:-

**“MANAGING AN INTERNATIONAL WORKFORCE IN THE
CRANE INDUSTRY”**

I believe this topic has at least some relevance to EVERY crane hire company in this region, as the workforces in Asia tend to be multinational .

As a result, managers find themselves dealing with personnel from a wide range of cultures, religions and educational backgrounds. This gives rise to significant challenges in terms of communication, as the common language of the site or project will often be English and THIS will probably NOT be the first language of the workforce. Therefore, difficulties will be faced to ensure that manager’s and manufacturer’s instructions are comprehensively understood in potentially dangerous, high pressure and high risk working environments.

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It is also important that members of the workforce are not inadvertently offended by a lack of understanding or appreciation of cultural differences by management in the content and manner of issuing their day to day instructions. As relative newcomers to Singapore we have been extremely impressed by the many initiatives which have been put into place by the government here to provide guidelines and training facilities to the workforce. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many neighbouring countries in the region. Therefore, it is very important when mobilizing personnel from outside Singapore that they are fully acquainted with and able to apply the high standards that are required in the crane industry . Nevertheless, there can be no getting away from the fact that the world of lifting is a high risk business and we can never do enough to mitigate the possibility of injury to our **own** employees, and the general public .As a result, despite the efforts within the industry to prevent accidents, from time to time we still find ourselves reading about undesirable events in the press which cast a shadow over our industry.



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Extract from The Straits Times, A Singapore Press Holdings Website



Last year, there were 162 crane-related accidents, which resulted in the deaths of five people and left 139 injured. -- ST PHOTO: BRYAN VAN DER BEEK

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A front page Article in The Straits Times on the 11th Of September 2009 described the Findings of a national taskforce that bosses, both on the ground and in the office, were the number 1 reason behind crane accidents in the last few years. In 2008, Singapore had 162 dangerous crane-related occurrences, a 27% increase from 128 cases in 2007. The task force selected and reviewed 40 of the crane accidents which occurred between 2003 and 2007. At least 7 men died and 3 were hurt in the 40 accidents, which involved mobile and tower cranes. The task force found that 24 of these accidents were actually caused by lapses of focus by persons in management positions. Those responsible were found to include supervisors on the ground who failed to inspect cranes and worksites properly before work started, or who failed to properly supervise crane operators who resorted to shortcuts and breaking the rules in their misguided efforts to get the job done fast. Although

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management were primarily cited as failing to implement a safe system of work which contributed directly to the largest number of cases, other factors such as their ability to implement adequate supervision and training provided for the workforce, maintenance of the equipment, site assessments and the assurance that appropriate equipment is deployed were also found to contributing factors .

Given the above findings, despite the close proximity of management to the workforce in this relatively small domestic market , which is highly regulated and in which high levels of knowledge are present , it would appear that the task of achieving **even these** levels of success internationally is extremely challenging indeed because the ability for the management to delegate responsibility to their local and site supervision across borders becomes even more important. When working internationally, methods must be found by management to ensure that standard company procedures are well developed and automatically adhered to without exception by the workforce at all times wherever they are in the world . A simple process of reporting is required whereby information is accurately and quickly passed to management that may not seem critical at face value in the field but may result in exposure of the company to a consequence later in a chain of events which leads to a potentially dangerous occurrence Part of the problem is that management are also responsible to shareholders to maximise profits and this is generally achieved by a combination of maximising revenue and reducing costs. A short sighted management team may focus primarily on reducing costs by minimising training and maintenance, reducing supervision or providing supervision who may not be fully qualified for the job at hand as well as recruiting a substandard workforce. Unfortunately even in the domestic arena this will be counter productive as it will not produce an adequate service to the client who will ultimately go elsewhere to get a better service for their next operation. This will then start a vicious circle as management will lose their key accounts And thereby further

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reducing revenue in the medium to longer term. However, the problems associated with such cost cuts are amplified as the international workforce and support facilities need to be as efficient and self reliant as possible at site level. Another concern is the potential lack of a comprehensive, and transparent contract which clearly sets out which party is responsible for what.

For example, even in well regulated markets the differentiation between hire responsibilities and contract lift responsibilities is frequently misunderstood by all parties including the management and line supervision. The possibility that this may lead to inadequate planning and therefore heighten the risk of accidents is magnified when working internationally in the absence of local legislation and conceptual understanding. Bringing these wide ranging issues together it would seem that the areas of particular focus for managing an international workforce boils down to the quality of the management and the workforce and their ability to effectively communicate between themselves and the client based upon the application of well understood systems and procedures. These should also allow reasonable scope for tailoring to the particular country, site and cultural conditions encountered in the project. The concept of the lift needs to be highly planned and well understood by all parties involved including contingency plans for conditions that may arise which are outside the control of the concerned parties for example, extreme weather or equipment breakdown. This is where management needs to have a firm grip on communication with their own workforce and their client. They must also have the skills to overcome all cultural barriers that may exist in motivating personal and getting their messages across in various forms. This should include inductions, tool box talks, and work packs which should contain method statements and risk analysis.



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In closing we, believe that this conference is an excellent opportunity for us all to achieve a deeper appreciation of these and other important issues and make a positive and constructive contribution to the mitigation of risk in the crane industry internationally .Therefore, may I take this opportunity to thank **you**, the delegates, for your attention and for participating in this conference, May I also thank our hosts, Cranes Today magazine, their sponsors and the Shangri-La Hotel for making this conference possible. Management needs to understand the crane risks and implement comprehensive procedures of working which shall lead to a safe result in the field on a timely basis. The workforce needs to be sufficiently competent to apply the procedures and documentation with minimal supervision especially when working in remote areas. The knowledge base of the workforce must be enhanced by continuous training with particular emphasis to properly interpret managers and manufactures instructions. The application of the knowledge base and standard documentation must be re-inforced by team building and motivation of the workforce Supervision must very carefully selected to ensure skills available to deal with cultural and language barriers with strong emphasis on team building and employee welfare, particular when working across borders

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