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## Town Center crane boasts newest safety device

Fire dept. conducts crane rescue training

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The latest crane erected in the Town Center will be the first with a device that electronically verifies inspections taking place. This will ensure safety and provide accountability to those responsible if an accident occurs, according to the crane's chief operator.

James Amphlett, an Island native and MIHS graduate, is installing inspection verification technology on the crane, which was recently put up at the 7700 Central construction site on S.E. 27th Street. Amphlett and his wife, Kim, own a crane personnel company that supplies crane operators throughout the region.

As crane operators, Amphlett and his employees are trained and responsible for performing daily inspections while they ascend to work. However, the report is generally not available until the operator descends. While the technology does not fundamentally change how crane inspections will be performed, it will change how they are recorded and verified.

Amphlett has teamed up with Eric Manegold, a co-founder of Zonar Systems, the inspection verification technology, and is replacing the old check-mark-on-paper system with an electronic handheld device that resembles a voltmeter and RFID tags.

Amphlett and Manegold have been working together to adapt the technology for crane inspections since 2003. The collapse of a crane in Bellevue last year, which killed one man, reinforced the need for better crane inspections.

"Everybody is interested in knowing that inspections will be verified," Amphlett said. "That's what Zonar does."

In addition to establishing a committee to develop some rule changes for crane safety, the response from the state government after the Bellevue accident has put more emphasis on crane inspections.

"People are looking for responsibility," Amphlett said. "Crane leases have gone from a two-page document to 20 pages. There's an effort to limit responsibility and liability."

That's where Zonar comes in, he said. The technology puts initial accountability into the hands of the crane operator, and responsibility can be followed up the chain of command to the general contractor and project owner. Zonar provides a system that can instantaneously trace why something would go wrong with a crane and who failed to react to it, Amphlett said.

While Amphlett, his employees, Manegold and the general contractor and owner of the 7700 Central under construction in Town Center agree that Zonar is part of the future for crane safety, there are additional requirements that may become law based on the state legislature's reaction to the Bellevue collapse.

Amphlett said most of the proposed rule changes would be a benefit to the industry, while others would only add unnecessary costs to development.

"Third party verification of inspections is a good idea and will make the industry safer," Amphlett said.

However, requiring operators to complete 2,000 man-hours of veteran-supervised operation to obtain certification is one of the new regulations he dislikes, Amphlett said.

"Having the extra operator — that's now two guys up there instead of one — for such an extensive time makes the supervisor become a distraction rather than an aid," Amphlett said. "It's also just a way for the unions to get another guy up in the crane."

According to Elaine Fisher, a spokesperson with Washington department of Labor and Industry, the state government started a crane inspection program currently being developed in collaboration with the industry.

"We will be drafting language of what the new rules might look like and next year there will be public hearings for anyone to state what they like or feel is missing or might not be the right fit."

Some of the proposed changes include requiring crane operator certification, mandating regular safety inspections and testing the structures. Amphlett said that crane manufacturers trained his employees to inspect cranes.

Adding Zonar entails a slight cost to developers, but Manegold sees it as a peace of mind.

"It's a minimum investment for a maximum return," Manegold said.

Manegold and Amphlett said the cost of adding Zonar to the Island crane was roughly \$2,000.

Now that the first is up, Amphlett and Manegold will be pitching the idea to use Zonar with local developers, emphasizing that Zonar could be placed on other construction equipment that requires inspection.

Amphlett has also orchestrated emergency response training at the job site with the Mercer Island and Bellevue fire departments. Orientation and a high-rescue training exercise took place last weekend.

Fire training was orchestrated with Lt. Steve Heitman of the MIFD.

"The benefit of the trainings is so firefighters can become familiar with the cranes and save lives," Amphlett said.