Working Under a Suspended Load

Introduction:

Many facilities use heavy equipment on a daily basis to lift loads or move materials. There are several types of heavy equipment including cranes, hoists, rigging devices, and forklifts that are used to maneuver loads, and often these loads become suspended. A suspended load is anything that is lifted off the ground, and it is common for employees to work near suspended loads. Working around or near suspended loads involves a high risk of serious injury. The most obvious danger is that what goes up, must come down. Sometimes these loads do not come down as expected; instead they come down quickly, ending with a crashing of material to the ground and a loud boom.

Discussion Points:

- What is a suspended load?
- Safety risks involving suspended loads
- Company safety policy, OSHA guidelines, operator knowledge and skill
- Working around a suspended load

Discussion:

The company should have a safety policy that includes the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines in reference to suspended loads. It is the employer's responsibility to ensure that employees follow the OSHA suspended load safety standards. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring all employees receive the required training and certification for operating and working around large equipment. Working around or near suspended loads requires a great level of situational awareness, operator knowledge and skill, and a good understanding of environmental conditions and equipment. Not receiving proper training can be a risk to the worker's safety and lead to serious injury or death.

There are many variables to consider in ensuring safe handling of loads, including the load size, weight, shape, and rigging selected to perform the job. The equipment operator is responsible for selecting and using the equipment appropriately and safely. Before the load is lifted, the operator should be in communication with workers on the ground. During operation, the operator should watch the load from liftoff to landing. It is important to be aware of the stability and path of movement or swing of a suspended load, and to understand the "fall zone" or the area in which the suspended load could fall. Only trained workers and a spotter should be allowed in the work area. The fall zone should be cordoned off with barriers to keep other employees away from the area. It is good practice not to allow any employees within a ten-foot radius of the suspended load, in case the load drops or equipment tips over. The load should never be raised higher than necessary or left suspended in the air. As the load is lifted higher, the fall zone increases in size, as well. Never allow anyone to walk near or work under a suspended load.

As always, stay safe out there!