

## Do you trust your rigging safety program?

A facility manager's guide to losing your trust issues

MY FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH RIGGING SAFETY involved settling a dispute between my arena stagehands and a family show promoter. The show was traveling with screw pin shackles that were not stamped and our stagehands refused to use them. I was a brand new manager and didn't know the difference between a turnbuckle and a rope sling, let alone the importance of stamped and rated hardware. What I did know was that I needed to listen to our stagehand veterans. Luckily, we were able to borrow rated gear from the theatre down the street to end the "shackle showdown."

A few years later I began working at a convention center that did not provide rigging labor. I was constantly in disputes with exhibitors and production companies. "You can't bridle off that steel! You can't attach motors to the catwalk rail! Do this. Don't do that." Finally one day I walked into my boss's office and asked "What kind of training certification is required to rig in this building? You have to have a certificate to drive a forklift—why don't we have an approved list of qualified riggers?"

His response was, "It's the production company's responsibility to make sure the riggers are qualified. We can't go up in the ceiling and inspect a hundred hang points on every trade show that comes through the building. At some point you have to trust they know what they are doing."

The fact was there were no generally accepted certifications at that time. In the convention center world most training occurred on-the-job by working your way up the crew ladder of the production house, contractor, or audio visual company you worked for. Union organizations had in-house training and, if you were on the west coast and had funding, you could send your best staff to a Harry Donovan or Jay Glerum workshop.

The truth today is rigging safety programs should not be based on faith or trust. A safety program should be based on mechanical, structural, and applied engineering principals, industry accepted best practices, and the use of stamped and rated hardware.

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As a facility manager, I applaud the Entertainment Services and Technology Association and the Certification Council for the comprehensive standards assembled within the Entertainment

Technician Certification Program (ETCP). I also appreciate the diverse membership base, viewpoints, and experiences incorporated into its principles.

As such, our convention center instituted the requirement of utilizing ETCP certified riggers and rigging supervisors for most suspended applications. The decision was really an easy one. Why would we continue to *trust* that all rigging beyond our line of sight is being attached safely and to best practice standards when, instead, we could be ensured of it by requiring ETCP certified riggers?

I do have to admit when you look at our requirements they seem fairly aggressive in the use of ETCP Certified Riggers as we require more than just a certified rigging supervisor. Our feeling was it would be half-hearted to only require a certified supervisor on large events with upwards of one hundred or more points. Could we trust that the supervisor got around to inspecting all the points out of human sightlines? We probably could, but the point of our safety program is to eliminate the word trust and insert the word *know*. We know our employees and attendees are safe walking under rigs hung by ETCP Certified technicians.

Along the way I received a few calls from other building managers who were interested to see if the program worked well or did we bite off more than we could chew.

### Paper and pencil exams offered at USITT 2011

All three ETCP examinations will be available at USITT's Annual Conference & Stage Expo in Charlotte, NC.

- Entertainment Electrician Exam—Friday, March 11 (2:00 p.m.)
- Arena Rigging Exam—Saturday, March 12 (9:00 a.m.)
- Theatre Rigging Exam—Saturday, March 12 (2:00 p.m.)

The application deadline is Thursday, February 10. Space is limited, so submit your application today!

## Lessons learned

The first step we took was to evaluate the size of the local labor pool to determine what components of rigging we wanted to cover under the program. When you require more than a certified supervisor you need to know what you are getting into. Mega-sized facilities would probably have a difficult time of immediately duplicating the requirements set forth at my medium-sized facility.

Find a way to incorporate uncertified personnel into work processes

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so they gain the experience required to take the ETCP exam. If there are two down riggers working on a truss line we only require one to be certified. Also, we don't require ETCP riggers for vinyl banners.

## Venues and employers in North America require ETCP

Over the last couple of years many venues and employers have made the important commitment to safely serve the entertainment industry by requiring ETCP Certified Technicians in lead positions. This commitment shows they take the safety of their audiences, performers, and crews very seriously and many have expressed the availability of certified technicians makes the search much easier when hiring.

“Proper knowledge of rigging principals, components/equipment, related engineering, and the application thereof is vital to assuring public safety. With the creation of the ETCP Rigging Certification program, we now have a means of measuring the knowledge of riggers in our industry,” said Thomas Fields, Building Superintendent Show Operations, Los Angeles Convention Center. In 2008 the LACC revised their criteria for companies to qualify for placement on their list of approved rigging contractors; including requiring that all rigging supervisors/managers be ETCP Certified.

Other venues that have followed suit by requiring ETCP Certified technicians in lead rigging positions include the Anaheim Convention Center, California Academy of Sciences, San Diego Convention Center, Starlight Theatre, and Toyota Pavilion. In Missouri, the Sprint Center and Independence Events Center require that leads in both rigging and electrical be certified. As of January 1, CBS Television City's new contracts

state that all stages must have an ETCP Certified Rigger during the entire run of the show.

Although, there are no mandates set forth at the Pacific Conservatory for the Performing Arts, they pay for testing, any costs associated with the examinations, and recertification efforts for their employees, and both heads of departments are certified. “It isn't enough to think you have qualified riggers and electricians working in your venue. You have to know. We know we have skilled people making sure our stages are safe places to be and this is the primary reason we are proud to be an ETCP Recognized Employer,” says Robyn Williams, Executive Director. In addition to the many venues, there are now almost 200 ETCP Recognized Employers and Labor Providers making these requirements a reality as well.

All rigging employees at Sapsis Rigging are ETCP Certified and National Production Services requires at least one certified rigger supervise every call and one to advance every event. Rigit Services in Canada is working towards 100% certified technicians and currently has a certified rigger on every call. 20/20 Theatrical (Theatrical Equipment Installation Services) requires that all their lead installers be ETCP Certified and that their secondary installers be working towards certification. Kish Rigging requires that anyone serving in the capacity of head rigger must be

ETCP Certified and has the most full-time certified employees with fourteen. Creative Stage Lighting has an initial goal in place to have all of their sales managers, rental technicians, and electrical assembly management and technicians gain the electrical certification.

Since ETC has entered the motorized theatrical rigging market with the Prodigy line of hoists, they are making an effort to assure that only qualified persons and companies are installing this rigging equipment. ETC has decided that the persons installing their hoist systems must be able to demonstrate their professionalism and knowledge. As a result, only ETC trained installers are allowed to install their equipment and only ETCP Certified Theatre Riggers are invited to participate in the training.

Please note that these companies are but a small representation of those who take this dedication to safety and the program seriously. It is extremely exciting to see that after only five years ETCP has gained true support from almost every aspect of the entertainment industry. Employers seem to be recognizing that there are inherent risks in this business and hiring shouldn't be one of those risks. Insisting on ETCP Certified Technicians in lead positions means that they are insisting on professional technicians who have proven that they have the skills and knowledge to provide the safest work environment possible.



After you have an idea of what you want to do, meet with the labor groups and contractors to inform them of the

requirements you have in mind and allow an opportunity for feedback. Be prepared for discussion as humans are seldom

## 94% of inaugural ETCP Rigging Certificants renew

The Class of 2005 ETCP Certified Riggers who passed the inaugural examinations came up for renewal this past November, as certification is valid for five years. Two-hundred and seven Rigger–Arena and Rigger–Theatre certifications were awarded and 94% of these certifications have been renewed. Those who are in the Class of 2006 ETCP Certified Entertainment Electricians will come up for renewal in October of 2011.

delighted by change.

Evaluate the cut-off date to require certified riggers. I recommend at least a six month notification to allow sufficient opportunity for study sessions, practice exams, and testing.

Determine the identification process you wish to use. Certified riggers check in at our security office and receive a special wristband. This allows us to walk through and check for compliance without interrupting the job at hand.

Don't assume your new program is perfect. Re-evaluate your program six months after implementation. Ask for feedback from trusted sources.

I have found that all of the newly certified riggers have greater confidence in their abilities and bring issues to our attention that went unsaid in the past. Remember, safety should not be about trust or faith. Safety is based on the right tool for the job, proven best practices, training, and testing.

Jump into the ETCP pool. The water is safe! ■



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