

A look at things (impartially, of course) from a rigging point of view . . .

**LOLER: Statutory Inspections**

After eight years, the 6- and 12-month intervals between statutory inspections required by the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER) seem to be generally understood. I find, particularly in theatres (which traditionally there was only an annual insurance inspection of permanently installed flying equipment) that 'rigging gear' is examined at least on an annual basis and the equipment is often of a reasonable standard compared with perhaps 10 years ago.

According to LOLER, all lifting equipment should be examined on an annual basis, lifting accessories and lifting equipment for lifting people should be examined at least every six months, i.e. more frequently owing to greater wear and tear and risk to safety respectively.

(A point of interest, to immediately digress, is that an inspection carried out by an insurance company may not be a 'thorough examination' as required by LOLER. Don't forget, the onus is on the employer to provide safe work equipment and as such the insurance company is not involved - they are typically assessing their risk, not yours. The insurance company should be consulted to establish this.)

Meanwhile, back at the plot . . . The interval between inspections is an issue that can cause confusion. So first some definitions: LOLER separates lifting equipment into three distinct areas. The first - lifting equipment - is anything used for lifting loads including the anchorages to the supporting structure, e.g. a counterweight set; the second - lifting accessories - is discrete lifting equipment that cannot provide any lifting by itself, such as slings, shackles, beam-clamps and even trusses. The third area - lifting equipment for lifting people - is another subject for another time, but covers MEWPs, rope access and positioning equipment, and other lifting equipment used for lifting people, e.g. the Wizard of Oz's hot air balloon basket . . .

LOLER requires lifting equipment to be thoroughly examined by a competent person and to be carried out often enough to ensure the equipment remains safe to use in the circumstances encountered in the employer's activity. That is to say, the item must be inspected often enough to establish and maintain its integrity by someone who understands the item, material(s) and manufacture, the way the item is used (in the

entertainment industry) and the consequences of any deterioration likely to take place.

What is not generally appreciated is that, where appropriate, LOLER also allows a formal 'written scheme of inspection' to be used instead of a rigid 6- or 12-month regime. This may be a more cost-effective and reasonable method for some. It is important to recognise the need for expert help in drawing up the scheme in certain areas - rigging and lifting equipment companies are a good initial source of advice.

Here are a few things to consider when drawing up an inspection scheme.

How often is the item used? Are some parts likely to be more worn than others?

Can any of the equipment deteriorate in storage if it is not used? (e.g. natural fibres, wire rope, chains or fittings stored in damp conditions)

What expected life do certain items have? (e.g. steel wire drifts: don't expect them to survive for long when used in the traditional manner on flying bars.)

Changes of use or changes in risk that should require a review of the inspection scheme.

Have you any recorded data - from inspection or maintenance logs, for example - to support your view?

Identify items needing simple visual inspection, those needing some training to examine, or where the necessary competence to enable thorough examination in-house would be lacking.

Identify the required level of inspection - simply visual examination, dismantling and visual inspection, with or without measurements, NDT (for example dye penetrant weld tests) operational tests, or load tests.

Are competent (trained and experienced) personnel available in-house and are appropriate facilities (e.g. time, workshop, test instruments, reference material) available to carry out a thorough examination on a specific item? (This will vary from item to item.)

Where 'rejection criteria' information (amount of wear, etc) may be found - usually from the manufacturer. (If you don't know the manufacturer, you can't find the rejection criteria, so you can't examine it.)

A risk assessment should help account for the environment in which equipment is used and the number and type of loads lifted or supported. Take into account the degree of risk associated with each item or part of an item when used overhead.

The competence required to assess a wide range of equipment to develop a scheme of inspection is probably the reason people find it easier to opt for the 6- or 12-month maximum periods, regardless of situation. Often, it is simply 'having someone else do the paperwork' or the desire to use a third party (Note: The employer is still likely to be ultimately liable).

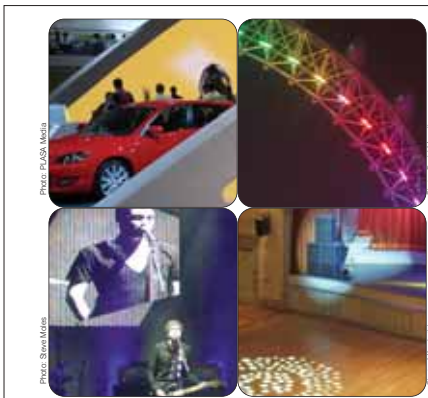
Make an inventory of all the equipment that needs statutory examination. Assess the complexity of the equipment and decide which items need to be contracted out, and which can be reliably examined by your own staff.

Certain items might be visually inspected on a weekly basis, defects being detected by staff and if you have enough kit, quarantined for subsequent inspection by an outside body at less frequent intervals. My guess is that roundslings and larger shackles could often be inspected in-house. The discard criteria are simple; the cost of replacement in comparison to the consequence of failure is small. Items such as barrels, trusses and so on could be inspected in-house with support from suppliers, manufacturers, and with some training; so might certain types of sling. Chain hoists, winches or complex mechanical items will usually be a matter for a specialist company.

If one were to interpret LOLER literally, and provided equipment is of good standard, one might argue some lifting accessories in a theatre environment are not exposed to conditions likely to cause deterioration and that inspection wasn't needed at all! A scheme of inspection may be justified instead. Items used only for a small part of the year or only for a specific production would be particularly suited to this risk-based approach.

The principal risk in the entertainment industry is that the equipment supports loads overhead; examinations must be made properly, but using rigid examination intervals may be unnecessary.

The use of a formal written inspection scheme is worth considering, but you need to take expert advice from a wide range of sources including manufacturers, designers, insurers, users and maintenance staff. Worth a thought?



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