

The Safety Benefits of Using Overhead Lifting Solutions

BY JEAN FEINGOLD



Members of the Crane Manufacturers Association of America, Inc. (CMAA), the Hoist Manufacturers Institute (HMI) and the Monorail Manufacturers Association (MMA) have joined together to form The Overhead Alliance. Its purpose is to communicate the benefits of using overhead lifting solutions to move materials within manufacturing and wholesaling facilities. Installing these overhead lifting solutions improves the safe working environment while also improving efficiency, productivity and reducing environmental impact.

What makes overhead lifting safer?

Overhead cranes, hoists and monorails move suspended loads within a predefined work area, allowing the operator to be a safe distance from the load, explained Dustin Krauth, regional sales manager/marketing at MHI member TC/American Crane Company. “Since the load can be lifted up and over obstacles, it does not need to move along the same path as the facility’s pedestrian traffic,” he said. As a

result, the operator remains safe while pedestrian traffic also proceeds safely because it does not have to share the space with floor-based equipment. With lifting equipment operating in a defined workspace, companies can safeguard workers and equipment within that area.

Using overhead equipment also provides the opportunity to automate lifting and transporting applications, set up protected “no travel” zones and include target positioning areas. Another benefit of overhead lifting solutions is that the

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operator can be socially distant from other workers, reducing the possible risk of spreading viruses.

By using overhead lifting solutions, both light and heavy loads can be lifted and moved more ergonomically, noted Laura Antenucci, marketing manager at MHI member Demag Cranes and Components Corp. “Overhead lifting can replace manual lifting,” she said. “When (ergonomically correct) manual lifting techniques are not followed properly or an awkward load is lifted improperly, injuries to workers can result.” Even when workers use correct lifting techniques, repetitive lifting of light loads can cause injury to workers over time. Using overhead lifting tools to replace human effort reduces that injury risk.

Custom made overhead lifting devices can be used to move loads of unusual shapes and sizes, added Henry Brozyna, industrial product trainer at MHI member Columbus McKinnon Corporation. This also cuts down the chance of injuries to personnel.

Overhead lifting equipment operators have another safety advantage



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compared to operators using floor traveling equipment. They can position themselves so they can see the load and its path without having to twist their bodies to look around the load.

Deciding whether to use an overhead lifting solution

In choosing a lifting and moving solution, each situation must be analyzed to find the most appropriate

method. “You must assess what you are lifting, how often, how much it weighs, where it is being moved, what else is around in the work area and everything else that could affect its movement,” Antenucci said. “An advantage of overhead lifting is that it reduces clutter and floor traffic in the work zone.”

With overhead lifting there is no need for carts or lift trucks to enter or be stored within the work zone. This leaves

the operator free to move and perform tasks in a productive and safe manner. From a safety perspective, this means fewer injuries from manual lifting. The reduction in floor clutter and traffic can prevent collision and tripping injuries and maximize your ROI on valuable floorspace.

Manual overhead lifting systems work well for repetitive moving of loads 2,200 pounds or less, Brozyna

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said, while powered systems are good for heavier loads. “A powered system can be manually maneuvered using a remote or programmed auto-dispatch with preset destinations,” he pointed out. “Some overhead systems can be programmed for full automation and require no operators.”

Each of the three overhead lifting solutions—cranes, hoists and mono-rails—can be the best choice depending on the particular application. To find the right one for your situation, Antenucci recommended consulting with a local company specializing in overhead lifting whose staff can review and offer the correct solution for the application.

Brozyna said users must ask these questions in making their decision:

- What will this overhead device be used for?
- Where will it be located?
- Will it be freestanding or mounted to the building structure?
- What is the required capacity, speed of lift and the distance of travel?
- What is the lifting height required? Are there any height restrictions?

Krauth recommended reading published materials and consulting experts when considering adding an overhead lifting solution. He points potential users to the Overheadlifting.org blog as a good resource for objective information from the industry’s experts. More information on overhead lifting solutions and help in determining which method is right for your company can also be found on the MHI website at mhi.org/solutions/overhead-alliance.

More knowledge is always beneficial

Overhead lifting solutions and their safety benefits are not always well known within the material handling industry. “Knowledge varies by company,” said Antenucci. “Some recognize the value of overhead lifting solutions and their ability to increase productivity and safety, resulting in very rapid ROI following installation. The money saved by avoiding even a single injury makes the investment immediately worthwhile.”

Krauth agreed, saying there are misconceptions about the cost of purchasing

and maintaining overhead lifting equipment compared to the risks of worker injury from manual material handling. “There are many government programs that provide grants to companies that replace a manual process with overhead lifting equipment,” he noted. “In addition, many insurance companies will provide discounts to businesses that install overhead lifting equipment. That says a lot about the known safety benefits of overhead lifting solutions.”

The final piece of the safety equation is the need for operators to be properly trained in using overhead lifting equipment. “That training is the responsibility of the employer or owner of the equipment,” Brozyna said. Training can be provided by the employer or by the manufacturer or supplier of the equipment. ●

To learn more about MHI’s Overhead Alliance, visit mhi.org/solutions/overhead-alliance.

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