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## *Corps of Engineers trains Afghans on crane safety*

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Ron Barkley, Safety Manager, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Detroit District, provides Crane Safety Training to about 80 Afghan National Army Engineer Cadets in Kabul. [USACE Photo]

**Kabul, Afghanistan**—On almost any Corps of Engineers construction site in Afghanistan, you'll find hundreds of workers buzzing around like colonies of Army Ants working in close proximity, swinging picks and hammers and simultaneously operating different pieces of construction equipment. Of all the tools and equipment used, the crane is probably the biggest and most expensive, and according to the U.S. Department of Labor, cranes are involved in more serious accidents than any other piece of heavy construction equipment. After a couple close calls on Corps of Engineers projects, the Afghanistan Engineer District conducted four days of formal crane safety training in Kabul during May for Afghan crane



Ron Barkley, Safety Manager, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Detroit District, shows Afghan Crane Operators how to properly conduct a rigging inspection. [USACE Photo]

operators, safety officers, contractors, and Afghan military engineers.

"We had a crane tip over and fall into the river in Tajikistan in December 07, and another tip over at Bagram Air Field a few weeks later," said Chris Beaman, Afghanistan Engineer District Safety and Occupational Health Officer. "Fortunately no one was hurt, but I knew we had to do something about it," he said. According to Beaman, there is no formal training for crane operators in Afghanistan, and the skills are simply handed down from one generation to the next. Beaman contacted Ron Barkley, Safety Manager at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Detroit District, and arranged to have him come to Afghanistan to conduct crane safety training. Barkley is a 41 year Corps employee who started out as a crane operator in 1968. He became a safety officer in 1984, and started a national certification program for crane operators in Detroit in 2003. Now he travels all over certifying crane operators through the National Commission for Certification of Crane Operators.

Barkley arrived in Kabul in May prepared to train about 25 Afghans, and had prepared a curriculum that included eight hours of classroom instruction to be done at the Afghanistan Engineer District Headquarters, and a two and a half hour session of practical application working with an actual crane. He broke the class down into two groups and planned on doing two training sessions over a four-day period. Arrangements had been made to use the

secure grounds of the nearby Afghan National Army Training Academy for the practical application portion of the training. In exchange, Barkley would have to train a few of the Afghan National Army Engineers at the academy, which was no problem. Turns out, a few cadets turned into 80, so Beaman and Barkley shifted the schedule around and did a special session for the Afghan Soldiers at the academy consisting of one and a half hours of class room instruction and one and a half hours of practical application training with the crane.

"I really didn't know what to expect before I came, but I was really surprised at how good a few of the operators were," said Barkley. "These guys didn't know how to interpret a load chart, but they operated the cranes 'old-school', by lifting loads until the crane's tracks started to lift up, then they would lower the load, lighten it, then try again". "I'm really impressed by how attentive they were," said Barkley. "It seemed they were starving for knowledge".

During the classroom training, students learned; crane nomenclature, hand signals, crane set-up, inspection, and how to interpret crane load charts. During the practical application training they learned; Safe set-up, daily crane check lists and inspections, rigging inspections, and how to conduct practical operator field tests. "A lot has changed in the crane industry since I was an operator," said Barkley. "Speed, sophistication, capacity and



Afghan students fill in their workbooks during the 8 hour period of classroom instruction held at the Afghanistan Engineer District Headquarters in May 2008. [USACE Photo]



An Afghan Crane Operator hones his skills on a PH Truck Carrier Hydraulic Crane during the practical application portion of the training. [USACE Photo]

reach have been improved. The crane is an indispensable work-horse on the jobsite, but operators have to know their capabilities and their limitations," said Barkley. According to Barkley, the biggest lesson for the Afghan students is learning to interpret the load-charts. "Until they learn that, they will keep tipping over cranes," he said.

"A crane is capable of operating safely and efficiently when operated within the design parameters set by the manufacturer," said Barkley. "This training will help the Afghan operators do adequate pre-planning and coordination, and will greatly improve the safety of everyone on Afghanistan Engineer District jobsites".

Chris Beaman, AED Safety and Occupational Health Officer also offers construction safety training. For more information contact Chris at: (540) 665-3471 or email at [chris.beaman@usace.army.mil](mailto:chris.beaman@usace.army.mil)

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