



Equipment Safety (Coming Through!)



**Greater Houston
Chapter**

Most, repeat MOST, equipment operators are careful and professional operators of their jobsite heavy equipment. However, a handful of "cowboys" make jobsites extremely dangerous when they use their rigs as if they are participating in a demolition derby. Are you one of these "cowboys?"

Equipment Safety for You

All jobsite equipment poses potential hazards for the operators and the people around them. Why? Because most of it is unusually large, moves swiftly, makes sudden movements, can fall on you, can malfunction, or the operator is just plain careless.

Each piece of construction equipment is different. Each has different functions, and control mechanisms vary from machine to machine and manufacturer to manufacturer. The key to knowing your equipment's peculiarities is the manufacturer's manual, which is provided at the time of purchase. If you're operating a piece of equipment and don't have a manufacturer's manual, talk to your supervisor and insist that you have it on the jobsite.

If you were looking at a piece of construction equipment for the first time, what would you look for? How about:

- Lights
- Guards
- Back-up Alarms
- Fueling Instructions
- Roll-over Protection
- Fall-on Protection
- Mirrors
- Maintenance Outlines
- Seat Belts
- Horns
- Shields
- Broken Glass

Is there a fire extinguisher on the equipment you are operating? Is it fully charged? Do you know how to use it? Can the fire extinguisher put out a major equipment fire?

Are your equipment's hydraulic lines defective? Are they leaking? Are they securely affixed to the portals at either end of the hose? Do you know what type of hydraulic fluid to use? Your equipment manual will tell you what type of fluid to use under specific conditions.

Do you smoke when you're refueling your equipment? Do your fellow workers? You're in charge, and you have the responsibility to insure safety.

Rules of the Road

In the construction industry, there are hundreds of rules of the road, and as a responsible equipment operator, you're expected to know and understand all of them.

If you're moving your equipment from the storage yard to the worksite, do you know local/state regulations regarding "escorts" and the permits you have to obtain before the move. Are you familiar with the "Slow Moving Vehicle" sign that is required if your equipment cannot travel at minimum highway speeds? Is your equipment outfitted with warning/flashing lights when it's on the highway? How about other signs?

When you're on the jobsite, who has the right-of-way? Just because you're the biggest guy on the block doesn't mean that you can bully everyone else. Also, don't use your excavator on haul roads designed just for trucks and automobiles.

Who's behind you? A bird, a plane, Superman? Or just some dumb slob who wandered up behind your equipment looking for the water cooler and didn't realize you were going to back away from the trench. Instead of getting that drink of water, he got run over. Who's responsible? If you're the operator, it's your responsibility to look in all directions (including up and down) to see that your equipment doesn't cause an accident. You're the captain of your ship, and you're responsible for its safe operation.

Each day before you begin your job, you should consider numerous jobsite conditions: wind, rain, snow, stop signs, direction of travel on the on-site roads, location of other equipment, activities of other subcontractors, holes, obstructions, water, mud, tools, electrical lines, open trenches, open manholes, and most of all, people.

As part of your jobsite rules of the road, you must be absolutely familiar with standard hand signals used by crane operators, flaggers, truck drivers, blasters, and other trades. If you're going to be a professional equipment operator, you have to know all aspects of your job from sunup to sundown.

Know Your Equipment

Whether you've been a professional equipment operator for twenty years or twenty days, there are certain steps to take when preparing to start your equipment. Sometimes we throw caution to the wind because we're the "best of the best." We think we know all there is to know about operating our rig. But are you operating 100 percent safely?

Do you conduct a personal walk around before you climb into your cab at the start of the day? Or do you assume it's in the same condition as when you climbed down from your cab yesterday? You realize that kids descend on most jobsites after hours and like to push buttons, pull levers, push pedals, and sometimes break as many things as possible.

And just like the old-fashioned filling station attendant, you clean your windshield, mirrors and headlights.

Do you remove any oil/grease spillage from your cab and the handrails? What about the cab's condition? Are there fast-food wrappers scattered on the floor, lunch buckets lying under the pedals, mud from your boots on the pedals and cab floor? Don't turn that key or push that starter button until your cab is clean and looks professional.

Does your equipment have factory-required procedures? If so, do you have the manual with you to refresh your memory? One industry manual suggests the following cab checklist:

- Sit in the operators seat and adjust it so you can properly operate all controls.
- Fasten the seat belt.
- Familiarize yourself with warning devices, gauges and controls.
- Make sure the parking brake is applied and all controls are in neutral.
- Clear the area of all people and equipment.
- Sound your horn.
- Following the manual's instructions, start the engine.

This is just one sample checklist. All equipment is different, and manufacturers might have other checks that they recommend before starting their equipment. And does your company have any equipment operator policies that you are required to follow?

By the way, do you always walk around your equipment, looking for flat tires, loose connections, oil/gas/fluid leaks, missing dials and levers, broken electric connections, or other signs of tampering? Professional operators always do!