

Understanding the Terms Competent, Qualified, Certified, and Designated

By Dave Decker



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In the crane and rigging industry we hear the terms “competent,” “qualified,” “certified,” and “designated” to describe persons performing a particular task. Sometimes these words are used almost interchangeably. However, they each have different implications, and the exact definition of the word may depend on the source of the definition.

OSHA definitions may differ from ASME definitions, and both may vary from Webster’s or Oxford’s dictionary definitions of the same word. In this article, we will discuss the definitions found in OSHA’s Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), as well as select ASME B30 volumes. Title 29 of the CFR provides regulations for labor or employees, and Title 29, Part 1910 addresses general industry, while Part 1926 addresses the construction industry.

It is important to consider OSHA regulations and ASME standards when working with cranes and rigging. Let’s start with the OSHA definitions of qualified and competent. Note that the ASME B30 volumes contain similar definitions.

Qualified vs. competent

OSHA defines a “**qualified person**” as a “person who, by possession of a recognized degree, certificate, or professional standing, or who by extensive knowledge, training and experience, successfully demonstrated the ability to solve/resolve problems relating to the subject matter, the work, or the project.”

A certificate of training, in a related field, is not the only factor in deciding if a person is qualified to perform a job. A certificate of training for basic rigging may not indicate that a person is a qualified rigger. Qualifica-

tion is determined by the employer based on several factors, including training.

To better understand the term “qualified person,” let’s look at some examples. A recognized degree in structural engineering, combined with applicable field experience, may indicate that a person is qualified to analyze a boom deficiency. An engineering degree in a non-related field, such as electrical engineering, would not indicate that the engineer was qualified to evaluate the same deficiency.

A journeyman rigger with 25 years of experience may have learned the trade from more experienced riggers over time without formal training; yet he may well demonstrate the ability to solve/resolve problems associated with rigging. Therefore, he may be considered a qualified rigger. Ultimately, it is the employer who determines if an employee is qualified to perform a particular job or task, based on the criteria discussed above.

According to OSHA, “**Competent Person** means one who is capable of identifying existing and predictable hazards in the surroundings or working conditions which are unsanitary, hazardous, or dangerous to employees, and who has authorization to take prompt corrective measures to eliminate them.”

What does all this mean? Let’s suppose you are the storekeeper at your shop with responsibility for assigning rigging gear. If an employee is capable of recognizing that a sling has been damaged and also has the authority to remove it from service, he could be considered a competent person. As the employer, you must be careful to assign authority to those persons who have demonstrated ability to recognize hazards.

In general, a person who has knowledge relative to the situation and authority to take corrective measures will be a competent person under this definition. However, it is unlikely that a competent employee would be considered a qualified person unless he had adequate training and experience.

To illustrate the difference between a competent person and a qualified person, let’s suppose a chain sling hook is damaged in use and the competent person removes it from service. The qualified person may determine that the sling can be returned to service after replacing the damaged hook and proof-testing the sling.

Designated Persons

OSHA regulation 29 CFR 1910.179, Overhead and Gantry Cranes, under general requirements, states, “Only **designated personnel** shall be permitted to operate a crane covered by this section.” No definition or description of a designated person is offered in this section.

ASME B30.2, the national standard for overhead and gantry cranes, offers the following definition for a designated person: “A person selected or assigned by the employer or the employer’s representative as being competent to perform specific duties.” ASME B30.2 does not contain a definition for “competent.”

Certification of crane personnel

There are currently no federal requirements for certification of crane operators in general industry or riggers or signalpersons. However, different state or local authorities, as well as employers or even contractors, may require certification as a means of assuring a well-trained work-

force. The employer should determine if certification is required or desired.

OSHA regulation 29 CFR 1926 subpart (CC) requires riggers and signalpersons to be qualified persons. Certification for these employees is still optional but recommended. Crane operators working in construction must currently be qualified, and by Nov. 10, 2017, all crane operators working in construction must be certified.

A “**Certified Person**” is one who has passed stringent written and practical exams related to the work that he or she will be assigned to perform. OSHA requires the organization providing the examinations be accredited by an agency such as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) or the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). Certification testing for crane operators, riggers, signalpersons, and others is offered by several accredited organizations. Training is not provided by testing organizations, and is not a prerequisite. Training is available from qualified companies and is recommended for persons planning to take certification exams.

Certification by an accredited agency does not guarantee or imply that a crane operator or rigger is qualified to perform every task. Certification is a documented indication of performance on a given date. A certified crane operator, for example, has demonstrated proficiency on a particular crane during testing. It is reasonable in most instances to expect a certified crane operator to be qualified to operate the type of crane on which he or she is certified. However, the working conditions or type of lift may require the operator to undergo additional training. For example, if the crane operator is not familiar with performing blind lifts, the employer may need to provide him with additional training or instruction before the operator is qualified to perform the lift.

Onus on the employer

So who determines if an employee is qualified to rig a load or lift it with a certain crane? The employer should ensure that the designated person is qualified. For example, a rigger who has years of experience working in a shop making repetitive, but relatively

straightforward lifts, may not have the knowledge and skills to rig a complex piece of machinery. Let’s say the load has a center of gravity in a difficult-to-calculate location, and slings of different sizes and lengths are required. This experienced rigger may not necessarily be qualified for this type of lift.

The same holds true for a crane operator. A certified crane operator with years of experience lifting from the hook may not be qualified to use the same crane with a clam shell or other attachment. The employer must ensure that each person is qualified to perform the task he is assigned to perform. Certification alone does not prove qualification.

It is up to the employer to determine the training and experience of an employee before assigning or designating that person to perform a task. The employer must be familiar with the knowledge, training and experience of each employee under his or her direction, as well as all applicable regulations and standards. Do you understand your employees’ qualifications and experience well enough? ■

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