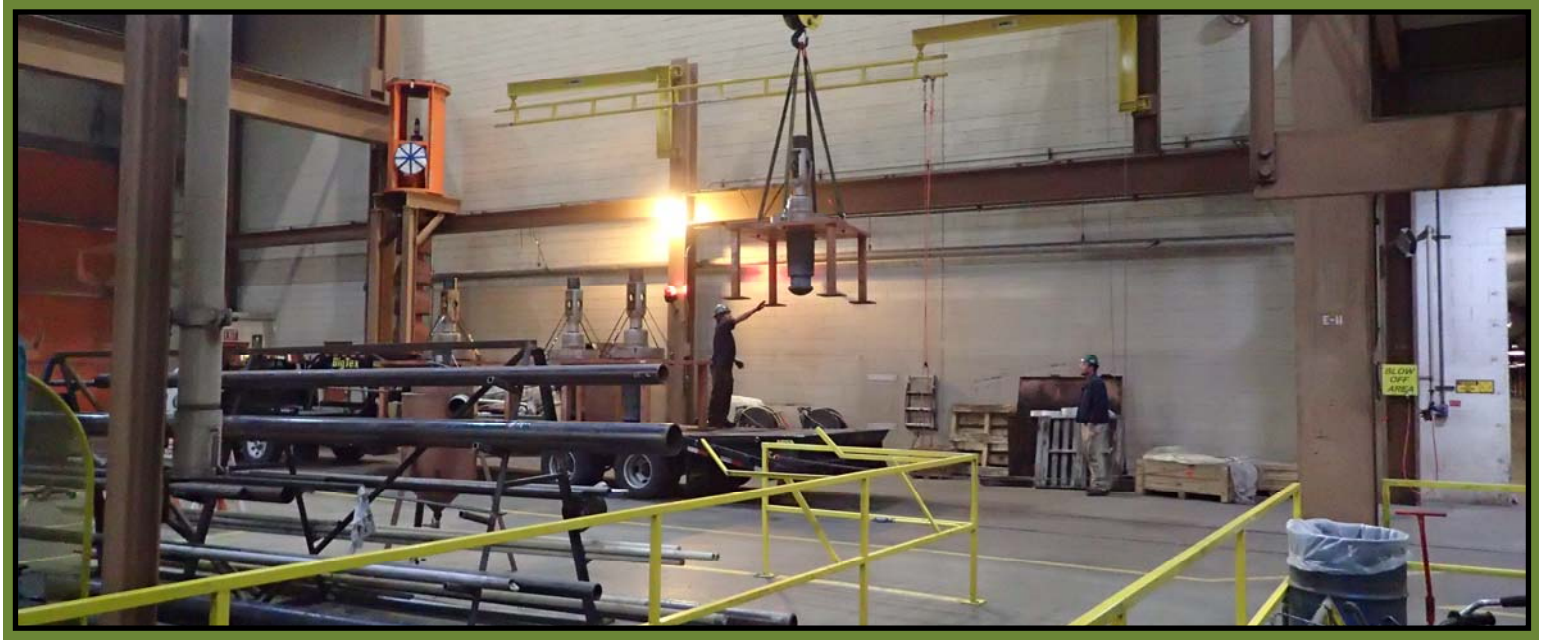
VOLTS Newsletter

VALUING OUR LIVES THROUGH SAFETY

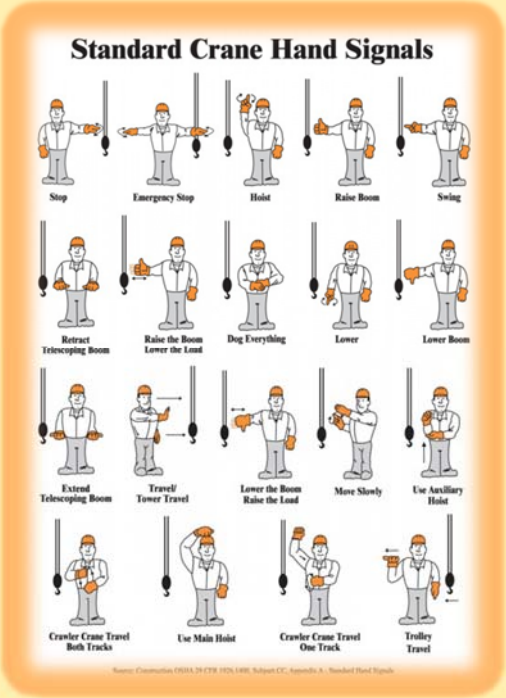
November 2018 Gina Henrie, Editor Volume 60



Hand Signals

The month of November is a time to reflect on the things we are thankful for. One thing we can be thankful for is being able to work for a company that puts an emphasis on safety. Since the VOLTS program has been implemented at IPSC, the number of accidents or injuries sustained while working has decreased significantly. Employees observing each other in their individual working environments have helped increase the overall awareness of safety.

The VOLTS Rincon report identified the importance of following the signals given by the signal person when operating machinery.



On a job site, one of the most important jobs is that of a signal person. This individual is responsible for signaling the machine operator and giving orders that pertain to the job being performed. In order for the signal person to accurately and safely direct the operator, he/she must know and understand the relevant signals to the job being performed. Just like the machine operator, the signal person must understand the operations and limitations of the equipment he/she is directing. While radio and other means of electronic communication with an operator are acceptable, using hand signals is the most effective and reliable form of communication. Electronic methods could potentially fail to work, leaving the operator and the signal person without means to communicate or give direction. Both individuals must fully understand all pertinent hand signals to have successful communications.

Using hand signals is an extremely effective way to communicate on a worksite. There are a variety of ways in which hand signals provide a greater benefit than other methods, such as:

- Clarity – Standard hand signals minimize ambiguity, as the signal person can only "speak" using signals, or a combination of signals, directly related to the operator controls.

- Speed – Visual signals are immediate. With any skilled signal person, he/she develops the ability to signal faster than a person can form words.

- Distance – Unless using radio or electronic communication (which can be delayed), verbal direction across distances can be easily misheard or misunderstood depending on distance. Hand signals eliminate this issue.

- Noise – Noise levels at job sites can be overwhelming with many machines operating at once, leaving verbal communication at a minimum. Keep in mind most workers wear hearing protection. Hand signals do not rely on the operator hearing the signal person.

To ensure success in all operations, adhere to the following guidelines when using a signal person:

- Any time heavy machinery is in operation, a qualified signal person with knowledge of standard hand signals should be present.

- Ensure that the signal person and the operator agree on hand signals before beginning.

- The signal person should always maintain visual contact with the operator.

- Operators should stop movement immediately if they lose sight of the signal person.

Most accidents happen as a result of not having a signal person present or misinterpreted hand signals. Both the operator and the signal person must take the time to study and memorize the necessary signals.

When Tragedy Strikes

A surveyor was spray painting the ground to outline the area for a new building pad. At the same time, the driver of a wheel tractor scraper was moving forward to get the ground ready for pad construction. There was no signal person at the site. Before backing up to go over the ground again, the driver checked his rearview and side view mirrors. He did not see anyone in his mirrors, so he backed up. The backup alarm didn't work, so the surveyor did not hear the scraper coming towards her. As the driver backed up, he ran over the surveyor. She died from her injuries.

How could this tragic event have been prevented? When heavy equipment on a job site has an obstructed view to the rear, a signal person wearing a reflective vest should be present to tell the driver when it is safe to back up. A competent signal person can save lives. When needed, a signal person should be used and hand signals followed to prevent the type of tragedy that occurred in the story.

Hot Work:
A Permit is Only a Piece of Paper

Working with ignition sources near flammable materials is referred to as "hot work." Welding, soldering, and cutting are examples of hot work. Fires are often the result of the "quick five minute" job in areas not intended for welding or cutting. Obtaining a hot work permit before performing hot work is one of the steps involved in a hot work management program. Hot work permits help reduce the risk of fires starting in areas with flammable or combustible materials by ensuring that regular operations stop during the time the hot work permit is in effect.

Workers who perform hot work can quickly become complacent. They don't realize that simply having the permit without making the area safe for hot work can place them and their coworkers at risk. It's human nature that the more frequently a task is performed, the more comfortable a person becomes with it. Before you know it, you let your guard down, steps are skipped, or you decide not to worry about safety because it will only take a minute—and then the unthinkable happens. Even the best hot work program can't prevent a fire or explosion if it isn't used, steps are missed, or hazards are ignored.
(Michelle Graveen - Industrial Safety and Hygiene News)

Who Checks to See If the Hot Work Requirements Are Met?

The employee performing hot work is ultimately responsible for conducting his/her hot work activities in a sound, fire-safe manner and following the precautions outlined on the hot work permit.

The VOLTS Steering Committee is thankful for the support that has been given to this process. Thank you for taking the time to be safe and speaking up to coworkers when there is an unsafe situation. That's what this process is all about—everyone helping each other get home safely.