

EDITORIAL

## Long Overdue Crane Safety

Published: August 2, 2008

The Bush administration generally prefers to fiddle, not regulate, as problems approach a crisis, but its failure to address accidents involving construction cranes is particularly hard to grasp. The administration isn't pandering to business interests. Both the building industry and labor groups have pressed for new standards and helped draft rules for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. That was four years ago. The rules are now parked at the Office of Management and Budget, where the White House seems content to let the clock run out without approving them.

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Labor Secretary Elaine Chao should get regulations in place without further delay. The stalling has had enormous costs. OSHA's figures show that crane accidents kill some 80 people every year. Agency investigators are spread thin looking into accident after accident across the nation. In New York, nine workers and bystanders died just weeks apart in the spring. In Houston, one of the nation's biggest cranes collapsed in July and killed four workers. Laborers in Las Vegas, shaken by crane risks and other hazards, walked off the job in protest.

This problem needs less after-the-disaster analysis and more effort to prevent casualties. Federal safety rules have not been significantly updated since 1971, leaving states and localities to fill the gap, and most have not. Nearly three dozen states do not even require that crane operators be licensed.

The proposed regulations are not perfect. They do not, for instance, define the meaning of competent in referring to crane inspectors and supervisors. But at least they mandate critical inspections, as well as certification and training for operators.

That's a start. Doing nothing, for four long years, to prevent unnecessary deaths is shameful and immoral.