

FACTORIES ENJOY LIGHTER SIDE OF CRANES

From article by Sarah Colyer, From February 2007 Factory Equipment News (FEN)

OH&S and productivity demands are driving a boom in light workstation cranes.

The logic of using a cumbersome overhead crane to lift a 30kg load is no logic at all, but manual lifting is an irresponsible alternative. Thankfully, smaller workstation cranes are just starting to occupy 'a place of their own' in the market, a number of crane companies recently testified.

Dawn McFarlane, managing director of Bomac Engineering told *FEN* manufacturers are increasingly interested in smaller workstation cranes.

"It used to be the thinking that if we need to lift 30kg then why not have a crane that can lift 1000kg? This is like using a hammer to crack an egg when a spoon works better," she explained.

"A great number of workstation cranes are being installed to overcome OH&S issues. The OH&S laws are requiring more pro-active rather than re-active answers to safety in the workplace and it is in the lighter end of the lifting range where people who think they can lift a load can cause themselves harm."

Konecranes president of South Asia Pacific, Ed Yakos, also reported an increasing business focus on smaller cranes, particularly its XM Workstation Cranes for loads ranging from 125-200kg. These are vastly different from the 1000t EOT cranes for which Konecranes is renowned.

"Sales of lighter cranes have risen more than tenfold over the past couple of years, and we still see considerable potential for our technologies which offer the speed, safety and precision essential for efficient crane operation in modern workplaces," Yakos said.

Demag has also been experiencing a boom for its smaller KBK workstation cranes, national sales and marketing manager, Ron Peterson, told *FEN*.

"Customers are very much going for more purpose-built cranes, or workstation cranes of lower capacity, in combination with the five, ten or 20 tonne overhead cranes," Peterson said.

Like Dawn McFarlane, Peterson said both OH&S and productivity incentives are driving factory owners toward the smaller end of the crane spectrum.

"You can tell workers they shouldn't lift things above 20-30kg but many employees just want to get on with the job and don't want to wait around on the large overhead crane. They'll try and turn it over manually where they really need a hoist or crane. If workers get injured and you've got compensation claims, they'll drive your costs right up," Peterson said.

"Where you've got repetitive jobs lifting a small load, workers doing it manually will be much slower at the end of the day. If they've got a hoist or crane they'll be able to do the job at the same pace the whole day. At \$5000 or thereabouts, a small crane is not a big investment compared to an overhead crane."

Dawn McFarlane reported that Bomac has supplied many workstation cranes to replace bigger, more cumbersome cranes which employees refused to use. A particular case was at a door manufacturing facility where Bomac replaced the larger crane with a Bomac Altrac for loading doors onto an edge trimming machine. This not only improved throughput on the line but positioning the door onto the machine went from a two person to a single person operation.

Small workstation cranes are typically light weight, with very little rolling resistance. Lighter loads are usually easily moved by hand, with motorised control options recommended for greater loads.