

It won't happen to me

Early one fall morning, a concrete formwork crew was building a machine base in a new industrial plant, using gang forms to encase the mass concrete and tons of reinforcing steel. High placing accuracy was needed because huge base anchor bolts to secure the machine had to line up precisely. A crane was available to handle heavy loads.

All went well until the crane brought up the last gang form, allowing the crew to button up the last of the formwork. Crane positioning was especially difficult because the form had to slide down between two existing walls—with very little maneuvering room. It was also a “blind lift.” The operator was totally dependent on hand signals.

While the crew carefully guided the huge form into place, a man on top of the form noticed a corner chamfer strip was damaged during panel placement. Because congested rebar prevented anyone from going down into the form for repairs, the form had to be lifted back out. The foreman signaled the operator to hoist the heavy form just high enough for a carpenter to get in to make repairs. The plan was to lower the form afterward. The crane operator hoisted the form, stopping as directed. Knowing that the repair



Two simple, basic safety rules were not followed: First, never work under a suspended load. Second, a crane operator never leaves the controls with a load hanging.

would take time, he “dogged off” the load line by setting the foot brake in the lock position.

Meanwhile, the crane operator heard his new oiler trainee moving around on top of his cab. Worried that a combination of oil on the rookie’s boots and the morning dew might cause him to fall, the operator attempted to signal him to get down. Failing to get the trainee’s attention, the operator stepped out of the cab, and, since it was a cool morning, he closed the door behind him. When the door shut, the jolt released the foot brake lock, and the load dropped. The heavy form fell on the repair carpenter. A serious injury resulted.

— Bruce Slattery is vice president for safety, Baker Concrete Construction, and a member of the American Society of Concrete Contractors’ Safety Committee.