

# The Warrior Approach to Risk Management

Special-Forces-style focus and commitment can make your risk-management program great.

**W**e all admire the courage, grit, comradery, and never-give-up attitude of Special Forces units like the Army Rangers and Navy SEALs. Although few of us could complete their rigorous physical training, we can adapt some of their attitudes and habits to help improve our lives and strengthen the risk-management culture in our workplaces.

Warrior creeds have been around for centuries, from Spartans to Samurai to today's elite Special Forces units. All of them have included a code of conduct and inspirational daily reminder of the "reason we train and fight."

The Navy SEAL Code, however, was created just a few years ago. Before that, the SEALs had an unspoken code defined by their culture, historical experience, and training. "Leave no man behind" and "Failure is not an option" are examples of cultural mantras that evolved into the unwritten SEAL Code. They have held to this code, never leaving a teammate exposed in the field.

## Similar Principles Apply to Crane Risk Management

Risk management in crane operations relies on many of the same principles as the Navy SEAL Code. You can see why when you consider

the life and death exposures in crane operations, and the need to rely on others to maintain a safe working environment.

The fact that "failure is not an option" in crane operations connects with a fundamental tenet in the way of the SEALs. Crane operating failures may have deadly consequences. Working as a team, having each other's backs, proper preparation, and open communication among everyone involved in lifting operations have a powerful and positive impact in preventing catastrophic accidents.

SEAL teams succeed by maintaining strong personal and team discipline. Successful risk management in crane operations relies on the same principles.

## The Power of Others

Crane operations can create life and death exposures, so the connections between crane operator, riggers, signal persons, and other project personnel have real tangible and measurable power. This *invisible power*, the power of the whole team working as a smoothly functioning unit, leads to healthy, safe performance.

The more we are surrounded by people who are motivated to work



**By Kevin Cunningham**

Executive vice president of the new risk-management-based insurance program for the crane industry at Redstone Heavy Iron, Atlanta, Ga. He can be reached at [kcunningham@redstoneins.com](mailto:kcunningham@redstoneins.com).

safely and communicate openly in potentially hazardous crane situations, the more contagious the positive energy becomes. That collective positive power can inspire continual improvement in crane risk management.

## Establish Risk Management Fundamentals

The SEALs have shared beliefs, consistent communication, and a deep commitment to helping each other. In contrast, on construction projects it's often unclear who is doing what, particularly when several trades are involved in heavy lifts. The need to bringing clear structure to the process should be a driving force for establishing risk management fundamentals in your crane operations.

It is clear that, above all else, SEALs' effective teamwork is one of their top strengths. The following SEAL insights could, and should, be applied to your program if you want to establish a foundation for continual jobsite risk improvement.

## The SEAL Code

- Loyalty to country, team and teammates
- Serve with honor and integrity on and off the battlefield
- Ready to lead, ready to follow, never quit
- Take responsibility for your actions and the actions of your teammates
- Excel as warriors through discipline and innovation
- Train for war, fight to win, defeat our nation's enemies
- Earn your trident every day



**1. Confidence, not Arrogance**

A SEAL does not display a superior attitude or arrogance, but rather confidence in his physical and mental abilities for the good of the team. So should everyone on your lifting team.

**2. Every Person Counts**

Doing the bare minimum to comply with safety standards can mean death to your workers. In contrast, every SEAL knows that the person behind him is trained and willing to save his life. Crane companies need to be able to say the same about their teams.

**3. Train Continuously**

SEALs spend most of their time training. In contrast, some crane and construction companies set up their risk-management programs to focus merely on complying with industry regulations, rather than to eliminate accidents.

Continuous training in safety practices and team communications is vital to both new employees and seasoned veterans. Your workforce and your company reputation are worth the effort.

**4. Everyone is Expendable**

Because anyone could be lost during combat, SEAL teams cross train so the rest of the unit can carry on a mission successfully. Similarly, crane businesses' risk-management systems must include alternatives so the team continues to work effectively even if it encounters unforeseen personnel circumstances.

**5. You Never Know the Measure of People until They are Tested**

During SEAL training, instructors prove that their people can do 10 times as much as they ever imagined. Until your crane team is tested, you can never be too sure who will step up and who will falter in any risk-management situation.

The SEALs have proven that there is a physical and mental energy when we form a connection with others. Establishing a *risk-management connection* between your people can be a powerful starting point to build a stronger risk management program that makes your operations safer and more secure. ■

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