Tower Crane Topples, Killing One

A shortage of crane operators and mechanics is being eyed as a possible contributing factor in a crane fatality in Bellevue, WA. A 210-foot (64-meter) tall tower crane flipped over and crashed into an apartment building, killing a resident.

Amazingly, the crane's operator, who rode the crane down, survived. Firefighters had to rescue him from the crane's control cab, resting about 30 feet (almost 10 meters) above the ground. Reportedly he was able to walk away from the scene, with minor injuries.

The toppling crane damaged three buildings, including a large restaurant full of diners. A Bellevue fire department spokesman said the crane operator told firefighters he heard a noise before the crane fell at a highrise construction site.

Following the incident the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries advised all owners and employers using tower cranes to perform a structural inspection of their cranes. They were asked to visually inspect tower bases and towers for cracks, cracked welds, stress fractures, chipped or flaking paint, rust spots and loose bolts.

A Seattle Post-Intelligencer report into the incident stated that tower cranes are in such hot demand that there's a shortage of workers to operate and service them. Further, the newspaper alleged that the state is lax in its oversight of crane operation. It noted that crane operators need not be licensed and cranes are not routinely inspected by the state's safety agency to ensure they have been installed properly.