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“The fact that you don’t need a [safety] ticket to run a 200-ton piece of equipment doesn’t make sense.”

– Kevin Sharp, President, Western Canadian Chapter, ADSC

Ticket to Ride

ADSC, NAIT preparing drill rig operator certification

By Heather Hudson



Some call it a safety blind spot in the drilling industry. Others accept the status quo.

Kevin Sharp is more blunt.

"To operate a fork lift, zoom boom or skid steer, you need a safety ticket. But when it comes to using a \$2-million drill rig, there's no ticket required. The fact that you don't need a ticket to run a 200-ton piece of equipment doesn't make sense," he said.

The owner of Sharp's Construction and president of the Western Canadian Chapter of the International Association of Foundation Drilling (ADSC - IAFD) is doing something about it.

"There has been significant damage to equipment and people severely hurt in our industry," said Sharp. "I think with proper education and guidance we can get better operators."

Two years ago, Sharp contacted the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT), the largest apprenticeship training education centre in Canada. It wasn't long before the ASDC Western Canadian Chapter and NAIT were signing a contract to create a drill rig operator education program. Ultimately, drill rig operators will require training and certification in order to use the machines. There will

be a process for grandfathering certification for experienced operators.

The first step was inviting representatives from the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training (AIT) board and members of the Western Canada Chapter of the ADSC.

"We had 30 members attend from our chapter of the ADSC alone. All the major drilling players were there, as well as a lot of the drill rig manufacturers and suppliers," said Sharp.

If NAIT and AIT needed an indication that the industry was ready, they had it.

"It showed support for the need for formalized training," said Sharp.

INDUSTRY PROFILE

They envision a two-year distance learning education program comprising of eight modules and roughly 400 hours. In order to be accepted, students must meet guidelines, including having worked a minimum of 450 hours in the industry as a front-end worker or small drill rig operator (first year) and 1,000 hours (second year). Each student will also need a mentor in the industry to verify that the goals of the program are being met.

Sharp says the program will be available to everyone, including high school kids just graduating – as long as they begin achieving their 400 hours.

“Parents want to see their kids get into a trade that is recognized and safe, so I think [the certification] will help us when we go to school job fairs,” said Sharp.

When it comes to more experienced drill rig operators, Sharp expects getting their certification won't be an arduous task.

“We're following the lead of the crane operator certification back in 1983. We're going to set the standard of what operators will be grandfathered



into the ticket,” he said. “They'll apply through their companies and may need to take an online training course and a few other things to become mentors of the students.”

Sharp says the program is set up to be global so operators in the U.S. and elsewhere can also take advantage of it. With course outlines complete, they've engaged subject matter experts to begin creating course outlines and build a program. They hope to begin the first session next September.

“NAIT just bought 165 acres west of Edmonton to move their crane operators program out there in anticipation of the drill rig program,” said Sharp.

Judging by the response of the industry to the idea of a certification program, Sharp expects it to be well received.

“The Suncors, Syncrudes, PCLs and other big contractors that see these guys coming on to sites every day will really appreciate knowing there is a standard,

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