

Crane collapse in Seattle claims four lives

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A tower crane buffeted by strong winds toppled, broke apart and crashed into the roof of a building in Seattle, Washington on Saturday, sending steel sections crashing onto cars on the busy street below. Two iron workers who were disassembling the structure died in the collapse, as well as a college student and the occupant of a car that was crushed in the accident.

Four others were hospitalized, while a 25-year-old mother and her 5-month-old daughter escaped one of the crushed vehicles with only minor injuries. Witnesses reported that the falling steel sent shock waves through the pavement as it struck the ground.

The crane detached itself from the top of the Google building, falling onto the westbound lanes of Mercer Street and landing on top of six cars on the eastbound lanes of Fairview in one of the busiest areas in downtown Seattle.

Andrew Yoder, 31, a member of Iron Workers Local 86, is survived by his wife and infant daughter. Travis Corbet, 32, a member of the same union in Tukwila, Washington, just south of Seattle, is survived by his wife Samantha of just 10 months.

A freshman nursing student at Seattle Pacific University, Sarah Wong, 19, died when the Uber car she was in was hit by a piece of the crane. The fourth person who died, also while in a car, has not been identified.

The crane was being disassembled, a dangerous operation under any conditions, but winds reportedly over 23 miles per hour made it especially hazardous.

“Whenever you’re bringing a tower crane down,” said James Pritchett, CEO of Alabama-based Crane Experts International, “it’s always got to be very low winds. It’s really a tender situation. Winds are your enemy. You need to find out beforehand what the anticipated winds are that day. In the event that high winds are occurring, you need to cease operations until they subside.”

The US Department of Labor reports that between 2011 and 2015 there were an average of 44 crane-related deaths every year in the US.

Last year, the Downtown Seattle Association reported record growth in city construction, with \$4.8 billion funneled into active construction projects. By the end of the year there were 66 projects under construction.

By comparison, 2017 saw \$4.3 billion of investment. Since 2010, the area’s residential population has increased by 38 percent and employment has grown by 39 percent.

GLY, the general contractor on the site, has been a major benefactor of the boom. The company was named *Engineering News Record* Contractor of the Year in 2015, with revenue of \$569 million, up from \$433 million in 2014, which in turn was up approximately \$200 million from the previous year.

The contractor made a name for itself at the Lincoln Square project in Bellevue, Washington, which began in June 2014 and included a 41-story hotel, with a residential component and 32-story office tower. Lincoln Square set the table for GLY to begin work on the four-building complex for developer Vulcan and its tenant Google.

Local news reports claim the construction boom has been relatively safe, stating that this was the first deadly crane accident in Seattle in more than a decade.

In 2016, nearly 5,200 US workers died on the job and another 2.9 million suffered serious workplace-related illness, injury or disability, according to the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

The Trump administration has said it wants to cut regulations on business to promote economic development, rolling back health and safety reporting requirements and leaving vacancies in departments that regulate health and safety in the workplace.

The following committees, set up to advise OSHA,

have gone dormant under President Trump:

1. Advisory Committee on Construction Safety and Health
2. National Advisory Committee on Occupational Safety and Health
3. Federal Advisory Council on Occupational Safety and Health
4. Maritime Advisory Committee for Occupational Safety and Health
5. Whistleblower Protection Advisory Committee.



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