

Australia's heavy lift industry has been divided by Standards Australia's introduction of new regulations for chain slings and short-link lifting chains.



New lifting regulations upset smaller operators



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Australia's new regulations (AS 2321:2014) for chain slings and short-link lifting chains have been in place for about eight months, replacing a previous standard written back in 2004. They were introduced with the aim of addressing industry developments over the past 11 years, which have included the influx of potentially inferior Chinese products and have seen the need to include reference to Grade 100 chain/components (see panel).

However, some think these regulations are not only heavy-handed, but may also be placing smaller firms in a difficult competitive position.

Ashley Thacker, general manager at Sydney, Australia headquartered Ranger Lifting – whose firm has taken a proactive position in aiding compliance to the new regulations – notes there has been resistance in some sectors.

"There was common agreement that the standards needed to be updated and more control measures were required to be put on the industry as a whole," he told HLPFI.



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– Ashley Thacker, Ranger Lifting

"However, there has been a huge backlash regarding some parts of the standards, with people believing that some of the key points were only written with a view to the commercial benefit to those writing the standards and to try to squeeze out some of the smaller independent lifting companies by going to excess on some of the testing requirements.

"Some of their arguments may have some elements of truth behind them but my thoughts are that if this new standard actually stops inferior products being sold and saves people's lives, then it can only be a good thing."

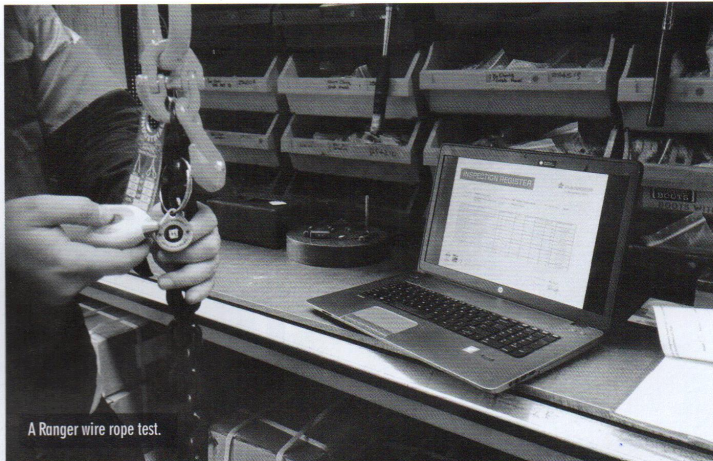
Chinese product

In that regard, Thacker noted that since 2004 there has been a "considerable amount" of Chinese product entering the Australian lifting and rigging market, whereas previously it had predominantly emanated from Europe or America.

"Most of the products coming from China have been rigorously tested.

However, there are a few companies who do not have the facilities to correctly test the equipment, resulting in inferior products being sold to the Australian market.

"This has the potential for great harm. These new standards have been written in a way that hopefully will put a stop to this and



A Ranger wire rope test.



A Ranger wire rope breaks during testing.

only products that can be guaranteed to meet the minimum requirement set out in the standards will be sold in the Australian marketplace.

“The knowledge of the person who is to re-certify these products has also been clearly defined. In the past, someone who had used the products for a period of time and had a rigging ticket deemed themselves competent to inspect lifting equipment.

“This has now changed. The difference between being competent to use and competent to inspect has now been clearly defined.”

Duty cycle

Of the ‘12 key points’ outlined in the new regulations, Thacker believes the introduction of ‘duty cycle’ is probably the most challenging to the sector. He explained: “This refers to how often a piece of lifting equipment is used and then directly relates to how often it should be inspected. In the previous standards, the inspection frequency was mainly stated at 12 months, whereas now it could be monthly if you use that piece of equipment more than 200 times in a week.

“This can make it hard to police by WorkCover (the New South Wales government agency established in August 2012 with the express purpose of increasing the competitiveness of the state economy through productive, healthy and safe workplaces). However, if say a crane company is only getting its chain slings inspected yearly and there is an incident, then it would have to explain to WorkCover why it only had the equipment inspected annually when it is using the piece of equipment more than once a day.

“For importers/distributors it has become

New regulations: the key points

New regulations from quality and safety criteria review body Standards Australia for chain slings and short-link lifting chains contain the following 12 key points.

- 1 ‘Competent person’ clearly defined and the difference between a user and an inspector clearly determined.
- 2 Periodic inspection guide now included.
- 3 Grade V (100) working load limits included (up to 32 mm).
- 4 Proof-testing – each sling shall be proof-tested after manufacturing, when load-bearing components are replaced and when tags are missing.
- 5 Guidelines for the use of in-line shortening assemblies included.
- 6 Maximum leg length tolerances in chain slings included.
- 7 Requirements and recommendations on the use of safety, with and without latches, included.
- 8 Self-locking hook inspections – maximum clearances between hook and latch and also the maximum tolerances of the plane of the hook must be determined.
- 9 New deration guide for corner loading.
- 10 Reeving angle – maximum angle is now 60°.
- 11 Ramshorn hooks – two two-leg chain sling assemblies to be rated as one four-leg sling (ramshorn hooks cannot be deemed as an equalising hook).
- 12 Engineered lifts – detailed guidance for design and application included.

more challenging to keep on top of the testing requirements. Previously, there was a requirement to test a proportion of all the equipment imported but now this has increased majorly. A minimum of 3 percent of all the products imported must now have break tests, elongation tests and hardness tests carried out and the material it was made from needs to have all these, plus a bend test, carried out.”

Worldwide scene

With regard to where the new regulations position the Australian lifting and rigging market on the worldwide scene, Thacker noted: “This is another contentious topic.”

He went on: “The European standards do not advise on periodic load testing as they believe it is to the detriment of the lifespan of the piece of equipment. The Australian committee stands firm on its views that load testing will identify weaknesses and flaws in the equipment that a visual inspection cannot pick up.”

A specialist in the lifting, rigging and safety equipment sector, Ranger has produced a comprehensive guide on the new regulations that has been distributed to over 20,000 contacts.

“We also had face-to-face meetings with all our clients to discuss how it will affect them and what Ranger can do to minimise the challenges associated with compliance,” explained Thacker. In addition to auditing all of our current local and international manufacturers, we are also about to commission two 200-tonne testing machines to keep our own quality control as per ISO9001 requirements.”

Furthermore, Thacker invites anyone who has any queries to contact him directly at Ranger Lifting.

