

# Missing pins possibly caused Seattle crane collapse

By GENE JOHNSON  
Associated Press

SEATTLE — It appears workers who were disassembling a construction crane had prematurely removed pins securing the sections of the crane's mast to each other, and that could explain why it toppled Saturday, killing four people, experts said.

Crane accident investigator Tom Barth said Monday based on videos of the Seattle crane collapse that "if the pins had been in, that crane would not have fallen over."

The crane's mast fell over on Saturday afternoon as workers were taking it apart. Sections landed on top of the new Google building where it had been used and on traffic below, striking

six vehicles. Two ironworkers on the crane were killed, as were two people in cars — a retired city employee and a college freshman. Four others were injured.

"The reason this tower fell over is ironworkers and the people working on it did not follow the manufacturer's instructions for disassembling the crane," Barth said.

Barth, who has been a tower crane operator, inspector and accident investigator for 38 years, said the only safe way to disassemble a tower crane is to do it by sections.

First, a line from another crane is secured to the top of the section being removed. Only then do workers remove the bolts that secure the section being removed to the one below it. The second crane lowers the section, Barth said.

The videos, including one from a dash camera in a car approaching as the crane fell, appear to show the sections of the tower crane separating cleanly, indicating the pins had likely been removed early, said Dave Kwass, a trial attorney who handles crane accident lawsuits.

"Where I would be starting as an investigator is getting a better grasp of what these two ironworkers who tragically were killed may have done in removing the pins," Kwass said. "What I'm seeing is a crane that looks as though the pins were popped all the way down to the pedestal section."

Kwass also suggested that the shifting weight of the workers at the top of the mast as they tried to grab the wind-swayed hook and line from the other crane might

have helped push the mast over.

Early pin removal was blamed after a tower crane mast collapsed during disassembly in Dallas in 2012, killing two workers. Terry McGettigan, a tower crane specialist in Seattle, declined to comment on Saturday's crash, but he wrote a paper on the Dallas collapse warning about the danger of taking shortcuts by loosening or removing the bolts in advance.

The Iron Workers Union Local 29 based in Portland, and Local 86, in Seattle, represented the workers who died and did not respond to requests for comment Monday.

Washington Department of Labor and Industries inspectors finished their work at the scene Monday, said Tim Church, a department spokesman. He said it was

too early to speculate on a cause.

The ironworkers who died were identified by their unions as Andrew Yoder, 31, of Washington state, and Travis Corbet, 33, of Oregon. Corbet's wife, Samantha Corbet, told Seattle television stations that her husband had served in the Marine Corps for five years before becoming an ironworker.

They married last year and planned to go on their honeymoon in June.

Also killed were Seattle Pacific University freshman Sarah Wong, 19, and Alan Justad, 71, who retired in 2014 as deputy director of Seattle's Department of Planning and Development.

In a written statement, Mayor Jenny Durkan called Justad "a true public servant."

## Salmon farm fined for pen collapse

By ROBERT MITTENDORF  
The Bellingham Herald

A salmon-farming operation will pay \$332,000 in fines for releasing a quarter-million Atlantic salmon into the northern Puget Sound when one of its floating pens collapsed in August 2017.

A statement Monday from the state Department of Ecology said that Cooke Aquaculture had dropped its appeal and agreed to pay the full fine.

"As a result of the investigation, Ecology fined Cooke for water quality permit violations that include: poor net cleaning and maintenance, failing to follow required protocol for repairs and insufficient attention to structural engineering," Ecology's Colleen Keltz said in an email.

Ecology officials said several government agencies investigated the incident near Cypress Island, about 10 miles southwest of Bellingham.

Lummi Nation fishermen discovered the incident when they started finding Atlantic salmon in their nets for Chinook, according to published reports.

To combat a potential ecological disaster, state Department of Fish & Wildlife officials issued an open season for Atlantic salmon, waiving limits on size and number of fish for anyone with a valid license.

The state lists Atlantic salmon as an invasive species that competes with native fish and can spread disease.

Cooke Aquaculture officials blamed the collapse of the pen on unusually high tides and swift currents caused by the solar eclipse, but the environmental group Puget Soundkeeper Alliance disputed that claim, according to a Bellingham Herald story and other reports.

In 2018, the state Legislature approved a measure to end farming of non-native fish in Washington's marine waters, effective in 2022.

Cooke still has four salmon pens near Hope Island, east of Deception Pass, and in Rich Passage, near Bainbridge Island, Ecology said.

"Ecology also is updating and strengthening the water quality permits for Cooke's four remaining floating fish pens," Keltz said.

As such, Cooke Aquaculture will face increasing state scrutiny, including video monitoring of net pens and inspections to assess structural integrity, cleanliness and maintenance, Ecology said.

Monday's settlement said that \$265,600 of the penalty will go to an environmental project related to regional salmon enhancements or habitat restoration, and the remaining \$66,400 will go to the state's Coastal Protection Fund.

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