



Information Item	Pinpointing every hazard, including the concealed
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*Following an incident early in his career, the Crane Association of New Zealand's Past President, Scott McLeod, has never been more diligent of the residential sector's hidden dangers in this month's **The Technical Corner**.*

Working for his dad in the 90s, Scott McLeod was tasked with lifting a single garage shed over a Katikati house and into the homeowner's backyard using a Kato MR100.

Parked between two houses, he couldn't quite manoeuvre it on to its concrete pad. So, he lowered the shed short of the pad and released the rigging.

"I then retracted the boom, leaving it short over the rear of the crane before raising my outrigger legs leaving the outriggers out."

Concerned he was causing the customer further delays, the Managing Director of McLeod Cranes then backed the crane up and promptly fell into a septic tank.

"Luckily, I had my outriggers out which caught the crane, so I jacked myself up worked out that I had now moved back far enough to place the garage.

"So, while straddling the septic tank, I finished the job but now I couldn't drive out. I had to call my dad – he said I was on my own and to stop stuffing around," he (now) remembers fondly.

"I soon worked out a plan to move forward using a number of timbers and the boom over the front of the crane. I left the legs out. I then crept forward and managed to cross the septic tank. I was very happy."

Unfortunately, things only became worse for Scott and his 10-tonne crane.

By increasing the weight on the front axle, he'd pulled forward off the septic tank. But now weighing more, he had found a soak hole he had already crossed and was effectively trapped between two houses, the septic tank and a soak hole.

"Ever since that day, I spend those extra few minutes digging up house plans and talking to people to identify what I'm seeing is actually what's there before setting up the crane.

"I've certainly learnt my lesson to take that extra bit of time and be diligent about the job."

Traditional building methods ensured soak holes were placed in the back of the property, like septic tanks, which didn't affect crane companies too much.

However, improved technology and changes to building methods now mean drainage cells can be placed under the driveway, with nearly twice as many soak holes located around the property – which are also now smaller in size.

Then add a crane into that mix, and it's a recipe for disaster, Scott says.

"We used to set up on the driveway or the front lawn of somebody's property but now, if you do that without gaining knowledge of where these are through the council and the property owner with council drawings for underground services – you could be setting up on a soak hole or a drainage cell.

"These are hidden hazards that haven't been as prevalent in the past as they are now.

"So, it's not just good enough to look at the plan, you have to talk to someone who saw them get put in or has a little more knowledge doing a new build, to check where they are.

"That means when someone rings you for a spa pool to be lifted over a fence or whatever, we now have to think about the due diligence that needs to occur in contacting the council or property owner."

Part of that due diligence may also involve calmly explaining to homeowners that 'a simple job' may require extra time to complete competently and safely.

Because, says Scott, pressure from homeowners is always a concern.

"It's one of those tightropes you have to walk, and I'd suggest kindly pushing back a little so you can get the plans.

"The likelihood of consequences is in the major category if the crane was to tip over, and the likelihood of that is probable. It's not a case of if but when."

Compounding this particular hazard are those undertaking the lifting, who are usually in their first couple of years with a company.

"So, I can't stress enough that you have really got to work with those guys, including sending out your trainer or going out with them and teach them how to read plans and show them what they've got to be looking for.

"And that includes showing them my little 10-tonne crane tipped over, leaning against a home.

"If that doesn't send a message to everyone – because we're passionate about health and safety – then I'm not sure what will."

Scott McLeod

CANZ Immediate Past President

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