Don’t “Just Do It”

The morning sun momentarily blinded Phil as stepped out of his truck. Only 7:30 in the morning and it was already warm. “Gonna be another scorcher,” Phil thought, as he trudged across the parking lot he’d crossed for more than 30 years. “Hope the weather lasts for the kids’ visit this weekend.” Phil smiled. He really enjoyed his grandchildren. Maybe he should listen to his wife and finally retire. Then he could spend more time with them. At 67, he’d certainly earned it.

As he made his way to the entrance of the 75,000 square-foot building, Phil began visualizing the morning’s task. The gantry crane needed to be moved today. Yesterday, when he and Tom moved the smaller one outside, they spent half the day disassembling it first. Today’s crane wasn’t going outside, though – just being moved 40 feet. And it was bigger, too. Rather than taking it apart, Phil decided it could be moved intact with a forklift.

But the task concerned Phil. Tom could handle the forklift, but with Rick still on vacation, they were a person short. He even talked about it with the HR Manager yesterday.

“Look,” the manager said, “if you think it’s not safe to move the crane without Rick, then don’t do it. You know your manager will understand. Just talk to him about it.”

Phil sighed, “Yeah, but I already voiced my concerns about placing the crane too close to the electrical bus bar. Management will think I’m just looking for an excuse not to do it. Besides, I could just borrow that new kid. We’ll be fine.”

“It’s your call. But you’ve got a good reputation with management. If you say it’s not safe, they’ll listen to you. Go with your gut.”

But Phil decided to just get the job done and over with. With Tom in the forklift, Phil and Pat, the new hire, prepped the crane for moving. Tom positioned the forks between the crane’s A-frame and Phil and Pat placed the cribbing into the A-frame. Tom raised the frame and lowered it onto an industrial wheeled dolly. They did the same thing at the other end of the crane. With both ends supported by the dolly, Tom positioned the forks beneath the inside of the crane under the horizontal beam. Phil and Pat stood at either side.

The forklift slowly started to make a left turn when the crane began to shift on the forks.

“It’s slipping,” Tom shouted. “Get out of the way.”

Phil saw that the steel support was indeed slipping and that Pat was right in its path. He moved in and tried to grab the steel support, trying to steer it away. It didn’t work. As the crane toppled over, it narrowly missed Pat. But it didn’t miss Phil. In a squatting position, beneath the crane’s frame, Phil was pinned to the ground.

Tom jumped down and rushed to Phil, where other workers were already gathering. He was unconscious. Together, workers lifted the crane. “Call 911” was the order. But by the time EMS got Phil to the local hospital, he was already dead.

Phil’s gut was telling him to wait for Rick. But that might not have made a difference. According to investigators, these safety guidelines might have prevented Phil’s death:
-Cranes and other equipment should be serviced and moved according to manufacturers’ directions.
-Employees should be kept at a safe position and distance from hazardous operations.
-Employers should conduct a job hazard analysis of all work activities, with the participation of workers