

64609-5

64609-5

NO. 64609-5-1

COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE STATE OF WASHINGTON
DIVISION I

IN RE: TOWER CRANE COLLAPSE,
Appellant
v.
NORTHWEST TOWER CRANE, et al,
Respondents

**BRIEF OF APPELLANT
(With Corrected Citations)**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION.....1

II. ASSIGNMENTS OF ERROR.....1

III. STATEMENT OF THE CASE2

A. Introduction2

B. Factual History3

C. Procedural History 19

IV. ARGUMENT.....22

A. Standard of Review
.....22

B. The trial court erred in granting NWTC’s motion for summary judgment when there was significant and undisputed evidence that NWTC breached its subcontract with LCL in multiple instances.....23

1. NWTC breached its promises to investigate, understand, and comply with all of the laws and regulations applicable to the erection of the tower crane on the asymmetrical steel foundation. 25

2. NWTC breached its promise to provide written notice addressing its safety concerns..... 28

3. NWTC has failed to explicitly name LCL as an additional insured on its commercial general liability policy. 29

4. NWTC has thus far failed to defend and indemnify LCL for the damages caused by NWTC’s negligence..... 30

C. The trial court erred in granting NWTC’s motion for summary judgment when there was significant and undisputed evidence that NWTC negligently failed to conduct the 360-degree test as required by law and to halt the erection of the tower crane after the loud noise that occurred during erection. 31

| | | |
|----|--|----|
| 1. | NWTC had a duty to ensure that the 360-degree load test was performed independent of the Subcontract and independent of the general duty to exercise ordinary care. | 31 |
| 2. | NWTC failed to exercise the level of care that a reasonable prudent crane erector would exercise when it recommended that the crane be fully erected after the noise that occurred during erection. | 33 |
| D. | NWTC's negligence was a proximate cause of the tower-crane collapse; MKA's acts were not a superseding cause..... | 35 |
| E. | The rule from U.S. v. Spearin is inapplicable to this case and is not a defense for NWTC's negligence. | 38 |
| V. | CONCLUSION | 39 |

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

STATE CASES

Anderson v. Dreis & Krump Mfg. Corp., 48 Wn. App. 432, 739 P.2d 1177 (1987)35

Crowe v. Gaston, 134 Wn.2d 509, 951 P.2d 1118 (1998).....31

Ebel v. Fairwood Park II Homeowners' Ass'n, 136 Wn. App. 787, 150 P.3d 1163 (2007).....24

Hearst Communications, Inc. v. Seattle Times Co., 154 Wn.2d 493, 115 P.3d 262 (2005).....23

Herberg v. Swartz, 89 Wn.2d 916, 578 P.2d 17 (1978).....36,37

Mathis v. Ammons, 84 Wn. App. 411, 928 P.2d 431 (1996).....32

Mutual of Enumclaw Ins. Co. v. Patrick Archer Const., Inc., 123 Wn. App. 728, 97 P.3d 751 (2004).....24

NW Indep. Forest Mfrs. v. Dep't of Labor & Indus., 78 Wn. App. 707, 899 P.2d 6 (1995).....23

Smith v. Acme Paving Co., 16 Wn. App. 389, 558 P.2d 811 (1976).....35

Smith v. Safeco Ins. Co., 150 Wn.2d 478, 78 P.3d 1274 (2003).....22

White v. Kent Medical Ctr., 61 Wn. App. 163, 18 P.2d 4 (1991)..... 23

Young v. Key Pharmaceuticals, Inc., 112 Wn.2d 216, 770 P.2d 182 (1989).....23

FEDERAL CASES

U.S. v. Spearin, 248 U.S. 132, 39 S.Ct. 59 (1918).....38, 39

STATE STATUTES

RCW 5.40.050. 32

WAC 296-155-525(f)..... 22

WAC 296-155-525(5)(f)..... 27,28

RULES

CR 56(c)..... 22

I. INTRODUCTION

Lease Crutcher Lewis (“LCL”), a Washington partnership, asks this Court to reverse the trial court’s “Order Granting Northwest Tower Crane’s Motion for Summary Judgment Dismissal of All Claims with Prejudice” dated May 4, 2009.

Respondent, Northwest Tower Crane Services, Inc. (“NWTC”), a Washington corporation, moved for summary judgment dismissal of all claims asserted by LCL. NWTC argued the court should dismiss the claims for lack of evidence establishing NWTC was a proximate cause of the tower crane collapse.

In response to NWTC’s motion for summary judgment LCL presented unrefuted facts clearly establishing that NWTC breached numerous contractual promises it made to LCL as its crane erection subcontractor, and that further NWTC breached the duties required of a reasonable crane erector under a theory of negligence. The trial court’s ruling is erroneous and unsupported by the admissible evidence presented by the parties.

II. ASSIGNMENTS OF ERROR

A. Assignment of Error

The trial court erred by granting NWTC’s Motion for Summary Judgment Dismissal of All Claims when there was significant and

unrefuted evidence that NWTC breached numerous provisions of its subcontract with LCL for the erection of the tower crane, as well as its duties as a reasonable crane erector under the theory of negligence.

B. Issue Pertaining to Assignment of Error

1. Did the trial court abuse its discretion by granting summary judgment when LCL presented significant and unrefuted evidence of NWTC's numerous contractual breaches and conduct which fell significantly below the negligence standards of a reasonable crane erection company?

III. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

A. Introduction

Appellant LCL seeks reversal of the trial court's order granting NWTC's motion for summary judgment entered on May 4, 2009. As outlined below, LCL provided unrefuted facts to demonstrate that NWTC breached its contractual obligations to LCL as its crane erection specialist. Further, based on industry standards and regulations, as testified to by NWTC's own tower crane expert, NWTC negligently failed to ensure the conduct of the appropriate pre-operational tests required of a reasonable crane erector. The trial court's ruling was unsubstantiated and contradicted by substantial evidence presented to the trial court.

B. Factual History

This case arises out of the November 2006 collapse of a tower crane at the Tower 333 construction project site in Bellevue, Washington.¹ During the project LCL served as the general contractor and hired engineering firm Magnusson Klemencic Associates (“MKA”) to design a steel foundation to support the tower crane.² Due to project constraints related to restarting a previously mothballed construction project, MKA suggested and LCL agreed to use a steel foundation to support the crane rather than founding the crane on a traditional concrete base, which would have involved cutting through several existing concrete floors of the preexisting parking structure.³

Concurrent with hiring MKA for the crane base design, LCL also retained Morrow Equipment Company (“Morrow”) to supply the leased Liebherr crane and to provide crane drawings depicting various tower crane schematics for the site.⁴ The multiple drawings, both preliminary and “for construction”, produced by Morrow varied based on a number of

¹ CP 23; CP 618.

² CP 618.

³ CP 618.

⁴ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk’s Papers, CP 388 (Supplemental Clerk’s Papers in this matter have not been issued)

factors including, among others, the position of the crane on the project site, the height of the tower crane, the lift capacity of the crane, the installation and dismantling sequence, and the forces exerted by the tower crane on the base under a variety of operational conditions.⁵ These drawings were produced by Morrow to ensure both that the designed base would adequately support the crane and to detail the steps required to erect the crane.⁶

Every expert who has analyzed the collapse of the crane agrees that the steel beams forming the crane's foundation were inadequate to support the crane as erected.⁷ While there is vigorous debate as to why MKA selected the particular beams for its design or failed to notice the lack of tie-in from the crane to the building's core, those failures were not the subject of NWTC's motion for summary judgment nor of this appeal, but have been described briefly to provide the context of NWTC's role in the crane collapse.

During the same time period that LCL retained Morrow and MKA to assist with the tower crane portion of the project, LCL also retained

⁵ CP 1460-1464.

⁶ CP 1460-1464.

⁷ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 389.

several other specialty subcontractors to assist with installation of the tower crane. These specialty subcontractors performed a variety of discrete functions on the project ranging from fabrication of the steel base, performance of inspections, as well as the assembly, erection, testing of the crane to place it into service.

1. Agreement by NWTC to provide crane erection services.

NWTC was one of the specialty subcontractors LCL retained to assist with the installation and placement of the crane into service. LCL entered into a subcontract with NWTC that required NWTC to “erect and dismantle of Tower Crane,” pursuant to the contract and incorporated attachments.⁸ NWTC made numerous promises in the subcontract, including the following obligations:

A. Existing Conditions and Requirements:

Subcontractor acknowledges its responsibility, prior to entering into the Subcontract, to investigate and familiarize itself, without limitation, with all laws, ordinances, and regulations applicable to the work under this Subcontract...⁹

K. Government Requirements/Inspections:

Subcontractor shall comply with all statutes, ordinances, codes, laws and other regulations and requirements of all authorities having jurisdiction over the work, or any part thereof; give notices to said authorities as required for the

⁸ CP 512.

⁹ CP 513.

inspection of Subcontractor's work and procure and pay for all permits, licenses, fees, tests, inspections, and privileges required in the prosecution of its work...^[10]

N. Indemnification: Subcontractor shall defend, indemnify and hold Contractor...harmless from any and all claims, demands, losses and liabilities to or by third parties arising from, resulting from, or connected with, services performed or to be performed under this Subcontract...^[11]

U. Safety: Subcontractor shall promptly provide Contractor with **written notice** of any safety hazard or violation found anywhere on or adjacent to the construction site.^[12]

Subcontract Special Conditions:

1. Insurance-1.1.4: Certificates of insurance evidencing the above coverages shall be filed with Contractor within five (5) working days of award of Subcontract and prior to commencement of the work and should read as follows: "It is hereby understood and agreed that Lease Crutcher Lewis (Contractor), Tower 333 (Owner), LMN Architects (Architect) have been added as primary additional insureds."^[13]

15. Defects and Conflicts: Subcontractor **shall examine all supporting and adjacent surfaces**, and report any defects or conflicts with the Contract Documents to Contractor in writing prior to installing any material. The installation of any material constitutes the Subcontractor's **complete acceptance of all substrates as compatible with the work** under this Subcontract.^[14]

¹⁰ CP 516.

¹¹ CP 516.

¹² CP 518-519 (emphasis added).

¹³ CP 523.

¹⁴ CP 527 (emphasis added).

2. First Phase of Tower Crane Erection

In late August 2006, approximately two weeks before the tower crane was erected, a crew from NWTC came to the jobsite and set the initial lower section of the tower crane upon the MKA-designed steel crane foundation.¹⁵ Once this initial nearly 40 foot section of the tower crane was placed on the steel foundation LCL's surveyors took measurements of that section to determine whether the foundation was level and the base section was plumb to within the crane manufacturer's required L/500 specification for "plumbness."¹⁶ The L/500 standard means that for every 500 inches of vertical height the tower crane can lean no more than 1 inch from absolute vertical to remain within the L/500 standard.¹⁷ After determining these measurements and finding them to be outside of this L/500 specification, the LCL survey team forwarded these measurements to NWTC in order to fabricate shims that would be placed underneath the feet of the tower crane to bring the tower section within L/500.¹⁸ NWTC subsequently installed those shims approximately one

¹⁵ CP 549.

¹⁶ CP 549.

¹⁷ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 292.

¹⁸ CP 549.

week later, and LCL's surveyors determined that the base section was plumb.¹⁹

In NWTC's motion for summary judgment there was an inference that because the surveyors who took measurements of the tower crane were LCL employees that somehow NWTC is less liable for the tower crane collapse.²⁰ First, LCL did not on its own initiative take survey measurements of the tower crane base. LCL surveyors were on the construction site daily and would assist NWTC when asked to take surveys of the tower crane.²¹ LCL has never denied that their surveyors were used to take measurements of the tower crane, and most significantly there has never been an allegation that LCL surveyors did not perform these duties adequately.

3. Completion of Tower Crane Erection

On September 9, 2006, a crew from NWTC led by Jeff Harr and Dan Schaefer initially installed the vertical components of the tower crane and then began to set the counter jib (horizontal section) on to the vertical

¹⁹ CP 549.

²⁰ CP 330.

²¹ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 298-299.

mast.²² Just after NWTC had hung the counter jib on the mast, but before hanging the main jib, there was a loud “bang” or “pop.”²³ After hearing the noise, LCL’s Kyle Kragseth radioed to all of the NWTC crewmembers who were working on the crane’s mast to come down to the ground.²⁴ Those who had been on the crane’s mast reported that the crane had moved when the noise occurred.²⁵ Approximately 15 people from NWTC and LCL gathered on the ground, and everyone was visually examining the foundation beams.²⁶ According to Dan Schaefer there was no clear consensus from the group as to what caused the noise.²⁷ Many in the group saw that a piece of plywood that had been used as a form for a grout pad just beneath the “feet” of the tower crane foundation had been crushed,²⁸ presumably due to the weight of the crane’s newly added

²² CP 550.

²³ CP 550.

²⁴ CP 550.

²⁵ CP 553.

²⁶ CP 551.

²⁷ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk’s Papers, CP 310-311.

²⁸ CP 553.

counter jib pushing down on the crane foundation.²⁹ Some of the grout in that grout pad had also cracked and crumbled.³⁰

However, Schaefer was not convinced of this explanation, and because of his unease he decided to call NWTC president Dave Weber to describe what occurred and to get his opinion.³¹ Specifically Schaefer testified in his deposition:

I told him [Weber] that, you know, something happened on this base, and it just didn't feel right, just didn't seem right. And he told me that, you know, we are going to see a lot of these different kinds of bases come along because it was just prior to that one we did one, it was a Liebherr designed cross frame with no weights on it, a couple of weeks earlier. And he just said that, you know, we're going to have to put our faith in the engineers who come up with this. And that was about all the conversation me and Dave had.³²

In spite of Schaefer's unease regarding the loud bang and the apparent excessive deflection of the crane base there is no evidence that he, in his role as lead foreman for NWTC's crew ever created a written report outlining his concerns as required by the subcontract.

²⁹ CP 552.

³⁰ CP 552.

³¹ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 312-313.

³² BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 312-313.

Shortly after Schafer's conversation, Jon Hagwood, the senior construction site superintendent for LCL also had a telephone conversation with Dave Weber about the situation.³³ By the time Hagwood, who at the time of the loud bang was in a construction office adjacent to the site, spoke to Weber, Weber testified that he felt he had a good understanding of the situation based on his prior call with Schaefer.³⁴ Weber later testified that, "the crane was out of balance and on a steel base which I didn't have a lot of experience or involvement in building—any, to be exact. So my concern was to get the crane balanced out."³⁵ Weber's recommendation to LCL was to allow its team to continue the erection of the tower crane "because the crane was in an unsafe mode being partially erected."³⁶ Coupled with his recommendation to continue the erection Weber also asked that Hagwood have the engineers come out the following week to examine the base.³⁷ Although Weber was clearly concerned as to the safety of the tower crane there is no evidence he ever put his concerns in writing as required by the subcontract.

³³ CP 562.

³⁴ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 293.

³⁵ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 294.

³⁶ CP 558.

³⁷ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 294.

Further, Weber firmly believed that he had the ability to stop the work and dismantle the crane if the situation dictated:

Q: In your mind, if you had felt that the situation was of the gravity when Dan Schaefer called you, you could have said, "Let's stop this; let's take a look at it; let's dismantle the crane," any of those?

A: Absolutely.

Q: Okay.

A: We already had stopped it.

Q: Exactly. But you could have had the crane dismantled as well at that point?

A: Correct. But there's risk in that too.³⁸

Moreover, both Dan Schafer and Jeff Harr from NWTC's field crew testified that they too had the ability to stop the crane erection for safety concerns.³⁹ Jeff Harr testified that not only could he stop the erection process, but testified that he was part of a crew that had done so five or six times before.⁴⁰

There is no evidence to support that Hagwood was heavy handed or exerted undue pressure on NWTC to continue the erection of the tower

³⁸ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 295.

³⁹ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 314-315; CP 317.

⁴⁰ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 317.

crane. Hagwood fully acknowledged, as the site superintendent for the general contractor, he had control over the entire construction site, and he had the authority to stop the erection of the tower crane.⁴¹ Hagwood further testified, however, that he is not an engineer or a “qualified” tower crane expert.⁴² Hagwood accepted Weber’s recommendation, stating “Northwest Tower Crane made the decision to continue on with the erection of the crane. And based upon them being the experts, I didn’t second guess their decision.”⁴³ Moreover Hagwood testified that even as the senior person on the site for LCL that day, he had no independent authority to order the continued erection of the crane. Specifically Hagwood was asked:

Q: So, if a decision were made to whether to disassemble the tower crane or continue the assembly of the tower crane, in terms of Lease Crutcher Lewis making a decision on that, you would have been the person to make that decision?

A: No.

Q: Who was the most senior person at Lease Crutcher Lewis who was going to make the decision that day?

A: Lease Crutcher Lewis would not make that decision. We employed Northwest Tower Crane who has the expertise and knowledge to erect tower cranes, to this

⁴¹ CP 558.

⁴² BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk’s Papers, CP 304.

⁴³ CP 562.

tower crane. So, we make sure that the site is available, traffic control is in place; they come in and then it's their responsibility to erect the tower crane.⁴⁴

Hagwood relayed Weber's recommendation to continue to the NWTC crew, and the erection of the crane continued which, according to Morrow's technician, "went very smoothly."⁴⁵

4. Post Erection Load Testing and MKA inspection.

Morrow technician BA Phillips stated that after the crane was erected on Saturday he and a team from NWTC arrived the following Monday morning to finish rigging the crane and conduct load testing.⁴⁶ Phillips principally conducted this load test with the assistance of an NWTC crew. Phillips testified that as part of the test the crane was rigged with loads representing 100 percent of its maximum load capabilities.⁴⁷ NWTC was responsible for attaching these maximum weight loads onto the hook of the crane.⁴⁸

In the meantime Hagwood did, however, make arrangements for MKA's engineers to visit the jobsite later that week so those engineers

⁴⁴ CP 557.

⁴⁵ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 319.

⁴⁶ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 320.

⁴⁷ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 320.

⁴⁸ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 461.

could investigate the cause of the noise and the spalled grout.⁴⁹ The timing of when these engineers or engineer from MKA came to the site to inspect the base is not definitive. Neither assistant superintendent Kyle Kragseth nor Jon Hagwood from LCL have consistent recollection as to when this occurred.⁵⁰ As well, the engineers themselves, Gretchen Humphrey and Doug Loesch, do not have clear recall as to when they visited the site and looked at the base. They may have looked at the base that Monday or Tuesday after a regularly scheduled owner's meeting, but conclusive evidence is lacking.⁵¹

What is clear however is that Dave Weber of NWTC lacked confirmed knowledge or details of any inspection from the engineers, or if it even occurred prior to sending his crew to the job site Monday morning to assist with the load test.⁵² This was in spite of the fact that his decision to allow the crane erection to continue two days prior was predicated on an evaluation of the base by the MKA engineers. Under Weber's authority, a NWTC crew loaded a suspect crane with weights representing

⁴⁹ CP 562.

⁵⁰ CP 558.

⁵¹ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 381; CP 384-385.

⁵² BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 296.

the crane's maximum capacity without an assurance that it was safe.⁵³ Moreover, it has since become apparent that the load test of the crane did not include a 360-degree load test, described in detail below, as required by law.⁵⁴ All evidence indicates that no one from NWTC informed LCL either that this test would not be conducted, or that the test was required by law to be conducted.

5. Summary of Relevant Expert Opinions

a. Information that would have been available to LCL and MKA had 360-degree load test been conducted

NWTC does not dispute it did not conduct a 360-degree load test or make sure that Morrow conducted such a test. LCL's structural engineering expert Richard Dethlefs has opined that conducting a 360-degree test could have prevented the collapse of the tower crane.⁵⁵ In brief, the 360-degree test requires that the crane lift a load at 110 percent of its maximum intended pick weight and swing that load in a 360 degree arc, stopping every 45 degrees for ten minutes and measuring "deflection," or the change in the levelness of the foundation.⁵⁶ This "deflection" was

⁵³ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 295.

⁵⁴ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 322-323.

⁵⁵ CP 584-585.

⁵⁶ CP 584; 607-608.

required, both by law and by manufacturer specifications, to meet the criterion of “L/500.”⁵⁷ According to Dethlefs, if the 360-degree test had been conducted, “certain configurations in the 360 degree arc of the crane that would have created loading conditions on the foundation that would have caused it to deflect in excess of the L/500 levelness criteria.”⁵⁸ Had those measurements of deflection in excess of L/500 been communicated to MKA’s structural engineers, those engineers would have realized that the foundation was deflecting excessively and then could have instructed LCL on how to stabilize the foundation.⁵⁹

- b. NWTC’s decision to continue erection and load testing of the crane after the “bang”.

LCL’s crane erection expert, Gary Campbell, has opined that “the prudent thing” to have done at the time of the noise during erection would have been to “remove the counter deck and get the crane back to simply vertical position.”⁶⁰ Campbell opines that NWTC’s decision to continue the erection was “the wrong way to go.”⁶¹ Campbell also questions the

⁵⁷ CP 584.

⁵⁸ CP 584.

⁵⁹ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk’s Papers, CP 349; CP 351-352; CP 353; CP 354-355; CP 356-357.

⁶⁰ CP 593.

⁶¹ CP 595.

primary justification advanced for continuing the erection, that of balancing the crane:

the theory with everyone has been "we're going to balance out the tower." Well, you attach the heel section, and then the assist crane has to raise the jib to allow it to reach the pendant bars. That raising of the jib while it's heeled adds more backward moment until you get it attached and lay it down and let it bring it back.^[62]

Continuing with the erection also adds "several thousand more pounds" to the already problematic foundation.⁶³

With respect to causation, Campbell opines that the crane's outcome "would have been different"⁶⁴ had NWTC decided to remove the counter deck and refused to erect the crane until the engineer had identified the problem with the foundation:

If you refuse to build the crane until somebody has determined what the problem is, there's a lot more scrutiny and involvement. You don't get that false sense that everything's okay, because it's obviously standing here.^[65]

Even if NWTC justifies continuing the erection of the crane to balance out an unstable condition, Campbell believes it was an error to load test the crane prior to having confirmation of an inspection by the

⁶² CP 595-596.

⁶³ CP 597.

⁶⁴ CP 598.

⁶⁵ CP 598-599.

engineers.⁶⁶ Campbell's opinion that placing maximum loads on a crane without that confirmation was not reasonable based on the concerns of NWTC's crew after hearing the loud bang. Campbell opines that failing to conduct the appropriate load test, as with continuing to erect the crane on a suspect base led to a false sense of security that the crane was safe.⁶⁷

Further, Campbell stated that NWTC's failure to produce any written reports as required by its subcontract based on the safety concerns raised by their crewmembers after the loud bang and visual inspection of the crane was not in accordance with the subcontract.⁶⁸ Campbell opined that the lack of any required written reports by either NWTC's field crew or president provided inadequate information for the design engineers to thoroughly conduct their follow up investigation.⁶⁹

C. Procedural History

On November 16, 2006, the crane collapsed instantly killing Matthew Ammon and damaging nearby buildings. In October 2007, the

⁶⁶ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 418-419.

⁶⁷ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 419-420.

⁶⁸ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 419-419.

⁶⁹ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 419-420.

plaintiff Ammon Estate sued MKA and LCL, alleging both parties had negligently caused the collapse of the tower crane. In addition, three plaintiffs, Plaza 305, Brickman Civica, and Intelligent Results (“Property Damage Three”), who owned or leased property that had been damaged by the crane followed suit shortly after. Those three property plaintiffs joined the Estate of Matthew Ammon in a consolidated matter entitled IN RE TOWER CRANE COLLAPSE (King County Cause No.: 07-2-33136-1). In this consolidated matter defendant LCL brought its own third-party claims against NWTC based on claims alleged by the Ammons Estate and the Property Damage Three, among others, for negligence, breach of contract, indemnity, and contribution.⁷⁰

In the IN RE TOWER CRANE COLLAPSE matter NWTC moved for summary judgment, which the court denied on March 25, 2009.⁷¹ It is noteworthy that NWTC lost this summary judgment even with the benefit of excluding the testimony of LCL’s tower crane expert Gary Campbell.⁷²

After its summary judgment was defeated even without the testimony of LCL’s crane expert, NWTC filed a Motion for

⁷⁰ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk’s Papers, CP 324-337.

⁷¹ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk’s Papers, CP 338-340.

⁷² BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk’s Papers, CP 398.

Reconsideration after one of the metallurgical experts in the case changed his opinion as to the presence of a prefabrication crack in the crane base.⁷³ Although the retraction by the metallurgist was a direct benefit to several defendants, it had no impact as to the liability of NWTC. The trial court however, granted this motion on April 20, 2009, in spite of the undisputed breaches of contract and the significant evidence of NWTC's negligent conduct that remained even after eliminating this metallurgist's opinion.

Notably, nowhere in its motion or reply did NWTC refute the factual evidence offered by LCL showing in multiple instances of where NWTC breached its contractual promises to LCL or was negligent based on the standards of a reasonable crane erector. NWTC instead chose to argue that its acts or omissions were not a proximate cause of the collapse.

While it is true that MKA's errors in designing the crane base were a proximate cause of the crane collapse, Washington law recognizes that there can be multiple proximate causes for an injury and the question that a jury should decide is whether an intervening or superseding act was foreseeable. NWTC asserted that when the MKA engineers visited the site after the loud bang occurred that its own contractual breaches and

⁷³ CP 776.

negligent acts or omissions were superseded, thereby relieving NWTC of liability.⁷⁴

Despite NTWC's numerous breaches of contract and conduct which fell significantly below the standards of a reasonable crane erection specialist, the trial court on May 4, 2009, issued an order granting summary judgment for NWTC dismissing all claims by all parties with prejudice.

IV. ARGUMENT

A. Standard of Review

Whether the trial court should have dismissed all claims against NWTC is a question of law and is reviewed *de novo*. Review of a summary judgment is *de novo*, and the appellate court performs the same inquiry as the trial court.⁷⁵ CR 56(c) only allows summary judgment where there is no genuine issue of material fact and the moving party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law.⁷⁶ On a summary judgment motion, the moving party bears the initial burden of showing the absence

⁷⁴ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 471.

⁷⁵ *Smith v. Safeco Ins. Co.*, 150 Wn.2d 478, 483, 78 P.3d 1274 (2003).

⁷⁶ CR 56(c).

of an issue of material fact.⁷⁷ Summary judgment must be denied if the record shows any reasonable hypothesis, which entitles the non-moving party to relief.⁷⁸

B. The trial court erred in granting NWTC's motion for summary judgment when there was significant and undisputed evidence that NWTC breached its subcontract with LCL in multiple instances.

NWTC does not dispute that it entered into a valid and enforceable contract with LCL requiring it to perform certain acts and take certain precautions as it erected the tower crane at the Tower 333 jobsite. A breach of contract is actionable “if the contract imposes a duty, the duty is breached, and the breach proximately causes damage to the claimant.”⁷⁹ In determining whether a contract imposes a duty, courts give the words in the contract their “ordinary, usual, and popular meaning” unless “the entirety of the agreement clearly demonstrates a contrary intent.”⁸⁰

There is no evidence on the record showing that the parties to this subcontract had any other intent than for it to be a fully integrated

⁷⁷ *Young v. Key Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*, 112 Wn.2d 216, 225, 770 P.2d 182 (1989) (citations omitted).

⁷⁸ *White v. Kent Medical Ctr.*, 61 Wn. App. 163, 175, 18 P.2d 4 (1991).

⁷⁹ *NW Indep. Forest Mfrs. v. Dep't of Labor & Indus.*, 78 Wn. App. 707, 712, 899 P.2d 6 (1995) (citing *Larson v. Union Investment & Loan Co.*, 168 Wn. 5, 10 P.2d 557 (1932)).

⁸⁰ *Hearst Communications, Inc. v. Seattle Times Co.*, 154 Wn.2d 493, 504, 115 P.3d 262 (2005).

expression of their intent. Any extrinsic testimony concerning NWTC's obligations or performance of the contract will not be admissible at trial because NWTC and LCL reduced their agreement to a writing. A trial court may not consider inadmissible evidence when ruling on a summary judgment motion.⁸¹ In Washington, extrinsic evidence is not admissible for the purpose of adding to, modifying, contradicting, or varying the terms of a written contract.⁸² Absent fraud, accident, or mistake, parties to a contract are bound by it as signed.⁸³

Though NWTC moved for summary dismissal of the contract claims, NWTC did not actually discuss any of the provisions of the contract it contends it did not breach. In fact, neither party has asserted that the contract between LCL and NWTC was not a fully integrated contract. NWTC's motion relied on statements taken out of context elicited via leading deposition questions posed to LCL and NWTC employees rather than the actual terms of contract at issue.⁸⁴ That

⁸¹ *Ebel v. Fairwood Park II Homeowners' Ass'n*, 136 Wn. App. 787, 790, 150 P.3d 1163 (2007).

⁸² *Id.* at 791 (citing *Berg v. Hudesman*, 115 Wn.2d 657, 669, 801 P.2d 222 (1990)).

⁸³ *Mutual of Enumclaw Ins. Co. v. Patrick Archer Const., Inc.*, 123 Wn. App. 728, 741, 97 P.3d 751 (2004).

⁸⁴ *BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers*, CP 451; CP 454-455; CP 462.

extrinsic evidence concerning NWTC's obligations would not be admissible at trial, and was improperly considered by the trial court in granting summary judgment.

1. NWTC breached its promises to investigate, understand, and comply with all of the laws and regulations applicable to the erection of the tower crane on the asymmetrical steel foundation.

In the LCL-NWTC subcontract, NWTC promised to "investigate and familiarize itself, without limitation: with all laws, ordinances, and regulations applicable to the work under this Subcontract,"⁸⁵ and to "comply with all statutes, ordinances, codes, laws, and other regulations and requirements of all authorities having jurisdiction over the work".⁸⁶ This meant that NWTC had to "procure and pay for all . . . tests required in the prosecution of its work".⁸⁷

One of the regulations that applied to NWTC's work under the subcontract provides: "Tower cranes erected on a new foundation shall be tested in accordance with ANSI B30.3-1990 Chapter 3-1."⁸⁸ Chapter 3-1 provides:

⁸⁵ CP 513.

⁸⁶ CP 516.

⁸⁷ CP 516.

⁸⁸ WAC 296-155-525(f).

After erection the structural support or foundation to which is the crane base is attached, shall be tested before placing the crane in service. The test shall be conducted with the rated load placed at maximum radius permitted by site conditions. . . . When the support is asymmetrical, the superstructure shall be rotated through 360 degrees with ten-minute stops at the starting position and at each 45-degree position. If any part of the support structure becomes displaced or distressed, all crane operations shall stop until an evaluation is made by a qualified person.^{89]}

NWTC could not be sure that it had properly erected the tower crane until that crane had been properly load tested, and the crane could not have been properly load tested until it was rotated through 360 degrees with 10-minute stops at the starting position and each 45-degree position. NWTC agreed to “procure and pay for” this test, and had an unfettered opportunity to ensure this test was conducted by Morrow, as NWTC was present and participated in the stunted load test that was conducted. Nonetheless, NWTC did not ensure that this test was performed.

As a result, there were no measurements as to whether the crane foundation was “displaced or distressed” in its most vulnerable conditions, conditions that engineering expert Dethlefs has opined would have showed deflection significantly beyond the allowable L/500 criterion. Had this information been conveyed to MKA’s engineers, those engineers would have been required to compare the foundation as built (without a

⁸⁹ CP 590 (emphasis added).

tie-in in the initial stage of erection) against their design assumptions (foundation with a tie-in in the initial stage of erection). This could easily have prevented the collapse.

NWTC asserts that WAC Regulation 296-155-525(5)(f) may be inapplicable to NWTC, however NWTC fails to acknowledge its contractual obligation to LCL.⁹⁰ Although representatives from Morrow and LCL signed the record of the pre-operational test, their signatures do not suggest that NWTC is not responsible for its contractual duty towards LCL, nor does it preclude NWTC from filing a “record” of each “test” performed, or acting in accordance to the aforementioned WAC regulation. NWTC had a contractual duty to “test tower cranes erected on a new foundation,” in accordance with ANSI B30.3-1990 Chapter 3-1, in addition to conducting necessary tests related to all work performed by NWTC, which NWTC failed to do.

NWTC further contends that the WAC Regulation 296-155-525(5)(f) does not require a 360 pre-operation test; it argues that ANSI B30.3-1990 Chapter 3-1 is specifically omitted from WAC 296-155-525(5)(f), and therefore not required.⁹¹ Contrary to NWTC’s assertion,

⁹⁰ CP 1052-1054.

⁹¹ CP 1065-1066.

WAC 296-155-525(5)(f) specifically states, “tower cranes erected on new foundation **shall be tested in accordance with ANSI B30.3-1990 Chapter 3-1.** Consequently, NWTC should have conducted a 360 pre-operation test and the trial court erred in granting its motion for summary judgment.

2. NWTC breached its promise to provide written notice addressing its safety concerns.

With respect to safety, NWTC promised to “at all times be responsible for providing a safe work site and be responsible for the safety of all personnel, equipment, and materials within Subcontractor’s care, custody, or control.”⁹² NWTC promised to “promptly provide Contractor with written notice of any safety hazard . . . found anywhere on or adjacent to the construction site.”⁹³ And with respect to the crane foundation itself, NWTC promised to “examine all supporting and adjacent surfaces, and report any defects or conflicts with the Contract Documents to Contractor in writing prior to installing any material.”⁹⁴ “[I]nallation of any material” by NWTC was to constitute NWTC’s “complete acceptance of all substrates as compatible with the work under

⁹² CP 518.

⁹³ CP 518.

⁹⁴ CP 527.

this Subcontract.”⁹⁵

There is little doubt based on the record that on the day of the crane erection and subsequent loud bang NWTC had significant concerns about the safety of the crane base. Yet, in spite of these concerns there is no evidence that NWTC ever produced any required written notice outlining its concerns. Not only was this a clear breach of the subcontract, but much more significantly, without a written report from a qualified tower crane specialist detailing events surrounding the loud bang, the potential causes, and the heightened level of concern of NWTC as to overall integrity of the crane base, the MKA engineers who came to the jobsite the following week to look at the base had no specific written information as to the nature of NWTC’s concerns or its unease about the base.

3. NWTC has failed to explicitly name LCL as an additional insured on its commercial general liability policy.

In the subcontract, NWTC promised that “Contractor . . . shall be named as [an] additional insured[] with respect to work performed by . . . the Subcontractor on behalf of the Contractor.”⁹⁶ The promised coverage

⁹⁵ CP 527.

⁹⁶ CP 522.

was to be “primary as respects Contractor”⁹⁷ and worth at least \$2,000,000 per occurrence.⁹⁸ Unfortunately, NWTC failed to explicitly name LCL as an additional insured, and NWTC’s insurers have not yet acknowledged that LCL is actually an additional insured on NWTC’s policy. Until LCL receives the coverage NWTC promised to provide, LCL has the right to look to NWTC for the benefit of the bargain it made: \$2,000,000 in primary insurance coverage, plus defense costs.

4. NWTC has thus far failed to defend and indemnify LCL for the damages caused by NWTC’s negligence.

Finally, NWTC promised to “defend, indemnify, and hold Contractor . . . harmless from any and all . . . liabilities to or by third parties arising from, or connected with, services performed or to be performed under this Subcontract by Subcontractor. . . to the fullest extent permitted by law”.⁹⁹ The only limitation on this duty was that the duty to indemnify “shall not apply to liability . . . caused by, or resulting from, the sole negligence of . . . Contractor . . . [and] only to the extent of negligence of Subcontractor”.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, these promises “shall include

⁹⁷ CP 522.

⁹⁸ CP 523.

⁹⁹ CP 516.

¹⁰⁰ CP 517.

Contractor's . . . personnel related costs, reasonable attorney fees, court costs, and all related expenses."¹⁰¹ If LCL proves that NWTC was negligent, as argued in detail below, NWTC will be liable to LCL for these defense costs and any damages that LCL is required to pay as a result of NWTC's negligence.

C. The trial court erred in granting NWTC's motion for summary judgment when there was significant and undisputed evidence that NWTC negligently failed to conduct the 360-degree test as required by law and to halt the erection of the tower crane after the loud noise that occurred during erection.

To prove an actionable claim for negligence, the plaintiff must show (1) the existence of a duty to the plaintiff, (2) a breach of that duty, (3) a resulting injury, and (4) the breach as the proximate cause of the injury.¹⁰²

1. NWTC had a duty to ensure that the 360-degree load test was performed independent of the Subcontract and independent of the general duty to exercise ordinary care.

NWTC's failure to perform the 360-degree load test was not only a contractual violation; it was a violation of the regulatory requirements applicable to the erection of tower cranes in Washington. To determine whether a defendant owes a duty of care based upon a regulatory

¹⁰¹ CP 517.

¹⁰² *Crowe v. Gaston*, 134 Wn.2d 509, 514, 951 P.2d 1118 (1998).

violation, courts in Washington ask whether the regulation was intended, at least in part, to do four things:

(1) to protect a class of persons that includes the person whose interest is invaded; (2) to protect the particular interest invaded; (3) to protect that interest against the kind of harm that resulted; and (4) to protect that interest against the particular hazard from which the harm resulted.¹⁰³

At least one of the purposes of the regulation requiring that tower cranes be subject to a 360-degree load analysis is to help prevent physical injury and property damage to innocent bystanders from falling tower cranes set on insufficient asymmetrical foundations. NWTC therefore owed an independent duty to make sure that test was conducted, the breach of which is actionable if it proximately caused damage.

However, even if NWTC's violation of this regulation does not impose a duty separate and apart from the duty to exercise ordinary care, the breach of a duty "imposed by statute, ordinance, or administrative rule... may be considered by the trier of fact as evidence of negligence."¹⁰⁴ Thus, NWTC's failure to comply with that regulation provides, at minimum, evidence of NWTC's negligence that was sufficient to deny summary judgment.

¹⁰³ *Mathis v. Ammons*, 84 Wn. App. 411, 416, 928 P.2d 431 (1996) (citing Restatement (Second) of Torts § 286 (1985)).

¹⁰⁴ RCW 5.40.050.

Finally, given the language in the Subcontract, NWTC should have been aware that LCL would rely upon NWTC to make sure that all tests required by law and necessary for ensuring the foundation could adequately support the crane would be conducted. These facts made it foreseeable to NWTC that, if it did not either conduct those tests or inform LCL that it expected some other party to conduct those tests, the tests would not be completed. Thus, NWTC had a duty to those who would be placed in danger by an inadequately tested crane and foundation to ensure that those tests were completed.

2. NWTC failed to exercise the level of care that a reasonable prudent crane erector would exercise when it recommended that the crane be fully erected after the noise that occurred during erection.

NWTC does not challenge the expertise or helpfulness of the opinions of LCL's crane expert Gary Campbell. As explained, Campbell has opined that it was imprudent to continue with the erection after the loud noise, that doing so was more dangerous because it put added loads on the already problematic foundation, and that doing so had the effect of deemphasizing the importance of the problem to the structural engineer. Campbell opines that the outcome would have been different had NWTC done what a reasonably prudent crane erector would have done: refused to continue the erection until MKA had identified the problem.

NWTC also breached several other professional duties. Crane erection expert Campbell opined that NWTC had the professional duty (as opposed to a regulatory or contractual duty) to make sure that the 360-degree test was conducted.¹⁰⁵ NWTC also had the responsibility as crane erector to be aware of the L/500 criterion, a criterion present in the same regulation that imposes the 360-degree test requirement.¹⁰⁶ NWTC failed to measure the tower crane for compliance with this criterion after the “bang” or during the load test, and structural engineers Dethlefs and Kevin Lewis both testified that the crane would not likely have satisfied the L/500 criterion had it been so measured.¹⁰⁷ NWTC also failed to make MKA or LCL aware of the significance of deflection beyond L/500 at any point. Kevin Lewis testified NWTC had a duty to so explain, could not expect LCL to effectively utilize that information without having the significance of the L/500 criterion explained, and was “foolish” in failing

¹⁰⁵ CP 599.

¹⁰⁶ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk’s Papers, CP 417-421.

¹⁰⁷ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk’s Papers, CP 370-371.

to notify MKA directly to ask what MKA planned to do about the excessive deflection.¹⁰⁸

D. NWTC's negligence¹⁰⁹ was a proximate cause of the tower-crane collapse; MKA's acts were not a superseding cause.

Generally, an intervening act is not a superseding cause “where the intervening act (1) does not bring about a different type of harm than otherwise would have resulted from the defendant's conduct; and (2) does not operate independently of the situation created by the defendant's conduct.”¹¹⁰ Only when the intervening negligence is “so highly extraordinary or unexpected that it can be said to fall without the realm of reasonable foreseeability as a matter of law” will it be held to supersede defendant's negligence.¹¹¹ The foreseeability of an intervening act “is ordinarily a question of fact for the jury.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 370-372; CP 349

¹⁰⁹ The same proximate cause analysis that applies to LCL's negligence claims also applies to its claims for breach of contract.

¹¹⁰ *Anderson v. Dreis & Krump Mfg. Corp.*, 48 Wn. App. 432, 444, 739 P.2d 1177 (1987).

¹¹¹ *Smith v. Acme Paving Co.*, 16 Wn. App. 389, 396, 558 P.2d 811 (1976) (“There may, of course, be more than one proximate cause of an injury”).

¹¹² *Anderson*, 48 Wn. App. at 443.

In *Herberg v. Swartz*, a hotel owner was cited for several fire code violations two months before a fire occurred at that hotel.¹¹³ Some of the uncorrected violations caused the fire to move more quickly through the hotel, allowing the fire to get out of control and leading the City of Yakima to hire a demolition expert to stop the fire. That expert negligently delayed his work, the fire burned longer than it should have, and, eventually, a wall of the hotel collapsed onto a nearby business. The hotel owner was sued by the owner of the business, and the hotel owner sought to prove that the negligence of the City and demolition expert superseded his negligence. The trial court refused to even let him put on *evidence* of his superseding cause theory, and the Supreme Court affirmed that decision.¹¹⁴

NWTC contends that MKA's failure to notice that the crane had been erected without a tie-in on the day MKA visited the site after erection of the cranes is a superseding cause that should relieve it of liability for its negligent conduct. While negligent, that conduct cannot meet the high burden necessary for summary judgment on the superseding cause issue.

¹¹³ *Herberg v. Swartz*, 89 Wn.2d 916, 578 P.2d 17 (1978).

¹¹⁴ *Id.* at 928 ("Since the trial court correctly determined that appellant could reasonably have foreseen the need for assistance by both the City and a demolition team, the proffered evidence was irrelevant and properly excluded.").

First, the harm caused by MKA's failure to notice the lack of a tie-in is precisely the same as the harm that would have resulted from NWTC's conduct: the collapse of the crane. Second, MKA's failure does not operate independently of NWTC's failures. To the contrary, NWTC's failure to conduct the tests required by law, failure to recommend halting the erection after the loud noise occurred, and failure to put their safety concerns in writing all contributed to MKA's failure and the crane's collapse. Had NWTC not so failed, MKA would have had far more information to work with during the site visit – including knowledge of significant excess deflection. That knowledge likely would have caused MKA's engineers to realize the discrepancy between its incorrect design assumptions and the relative weakness of the as-built foundation. Under these circumstances, like those involving the negligent demolition man in *Herberg*, MKA's intervening negligence was not so highly extraordinary or unexpected that it must be said to fall outside the realm of reasonable foreseeability as a matter of law. These are questions of fact for a jury.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ The issues of fact that remain as to NWTC's negligence also defeat NWTC's motion to dismiss as it pertains to LCL's contribution claim, because that motion is based solely on the premise that NWTC bears no fault for the collapse of the crane.

E. The rule from *U.S. v. Spearin* is inapplicable to this case and is not a defense for NWTC's negligence.

In its motion for summary judgment NWTC contended that the rule recited in *U.S. v. Spearin* prevents NWTC from being liable for any of the harm caused by the crane collapse because NWTC did not participate in the design of the crane foundation.¹¹⁶ In *Spearin*, the Court pointed out that when a contractor is bound to build according to plans and specifications prepared by the owner, "the contractor will not be responsible for the consequences of defects in the plans and specifications."¹¹⁷ Thus, NWTC is correct to the extent that it cannot be held liable for the portions of its work that merely involved following the specifications provided to it by LCL.

However, LCL's claims against NWTC are not based upon those portions of NWTC's work. LCL's claims are based upon NWTC's deviations from what it agreed to do (breach of contract) and upon NWTC's deviations from the various applicable standards of care (negligence). In other words, NWTC was not "following specifications"

¹¹⁶ BRE Properties Inc. vs. Lease Crutcher Lewis et al Clerk's Papers, CP 468-469.

¹¹⁷ *U.S. v. Spearin*, 248 U.S. 132, 39 S.Ct. 59 (1918); see also *Weston v. New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church*, 23 Wn. App. 747, 753, 598 P.2d 411 (1978) ("when, as in the subject case, a contractor is required to build in accordance with plans and specifications furnished by the owner, it is the owner, not the contractor, who impliedly guarantees that the plans are workable and sufficient.").

when it failed to procure the necessary tests and made the imprudent recommendation to continue erecting the crane notwithstanding the apparently flawed design. The *Spearin* rule is not a license to ignore the law, to ignore contractual duties, or to simply remain silent in the face of facts indicating an imminent and preventable tragedy.

V. CONCLUSION

The trial court's decision to grant summary judgment to NWTC was clearly erroneous. There are multiple instances in which NWTC breached its subcontract with LCL to safely erect the tower crane. None of these breaches of contract have been refuted by NWTC, and there is ample evidence that these breaches were the proximate cause, or at a minimum, a proximate cause of the tower crane collapse. Moreover, independent of NWTC's multiple breaches of its contractual promises, NWTC's acts or failures to act were negligent, as NWTC failed to exercise the level of care that a reasonable prudent crane erector would exercise in the safe erection of a tower crane.

In short, NWTC has failed to meet its burden for summary judgment dismissal on any of its proffered legal theories. NWTC efforts to shift blame to the design engineer attempts to overlook NWTC's critical role in the process. In essence NWTC was contracted to act as a check and balance system, an independent third party adding a layer of oversight

and independent verification that the crane was safe. They did not. They expressed multiple concerns about the integrity of the base during the erection of the tower crane. They had limited experience with this type of crane base, and yet chose not to err on the side of caution. They failed to ensure the conduct of a pre-operational test that experts stated would have revealed excess deflection in the base. NWTC was the last best chance to appreciate the design flaw.

There were multiple proximate causes to this collapse, but there is no doubt that NWTC's failure to abide by the contract and perform testing as required of a reasonable erector contributed to the crane collapse. There is clearly enough evidence to indicate the trial court's grant of summary judgment was erroneous. LCL respectfully requests that this Court reverse the trial court's order.

DATED this 24 day of May, 2010.

Respectfully submitted,
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