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APNewsBreak: Feds to release new crane rules

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WASHINGTON -- The federal government is to announce it will require crane operators nationwide to pass a certification test in its first update of crane regulations in nearly four decades, officials said Thursday.

The U.S. Department of Labor was to release draft regulations for the first time since 1971, after several deadly crane accidents this year, including two that killed nine people in New York City. A crane collapse in Houston killed four people in July.

The draft rules will require crane operators to pass written and practical tests in all 50 states and also will require the operators to undergo more training.

Just 15 states and six cities - including New York state and New York City - require the tests. Texas, which led the nation in deadly crane accidents for the past three years, does not.

The proposed rule "comprehensively addresses the hazards associated with the uses of cranes and derricks in construction, including tower cranes," said Edwin G. Foulke Jr., the assistant secretary of labor for Occupational Safety and Health.

"This draft rule will both protect construction employees and help prevent crane accidents by updating existing protections and requiring crane operators to be trained in the use of construction cranes."

The rules will cover a vast majority of the 96,000 cranes across the country, officials said. Another new proposal would require crane operators to use equipment or a spotter to check for power lines and assess the terrain where they will be working before operating a crane.

Industry officials had called for uniform standards for operating cranes for months and had pushed the government to move quicker to update the standards. A final approval process will likely take over a year.