ASSE members continue to have significant interest in a new standard aimed at protecting workers who install, alter or maintain communication towers offers the first comprehensive approach reducing injuries and saving lives in industry that has rapidly expanded in recent years.

On August 3, 2016, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) has approved A10.48, Criteria for Safety Practices with the Construction, Demolition, Modification and Maintenance of Communications Structures, the first voluntary national consensus standard strictly dedicated to protecting workers in the communications tower industry.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 13 communication tower workers were killed in 2013 and another 11 were killed 2014, leading to efforts by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to focus inspection resources on the industry and to work with the communications tower industry to address the risks. Most of the fatalities were the results of falls from heights.

The new standard establishes minimum criteria for safe work practices and training for personnel performing work on communication structures including antenna and antenna supporting structures, broadcast and other similar structures supporting communication related equipment.
Response from the construction and demolition industry has been significant and positive, “The ANSI/ASSE A10.48 Standard is the culmination of 13 years of work by ASSE and hundreds of other industry volunteers who identified safety best-practices in putting this standard together,” said Richard King, Chairman of the A-10 Committee that developed the standard and saw its approval by ANSI. “A10.48 brought some of the best minds in the industry to tackle a serious problem for the telecommunications industry. We broke down each activity related to working on a communications tower and provided safety measures that we hope will reduce injuries and fatalities.”

In addition, ASSE members have asked for information on the impact of the standard from the perspective of business and industry. ASSE recently conducted interview with Todd Schlekeway. Todd is the Executive Director of the National Association of Tower Erectors (NATE).

Due to his network and position in the industry Todd Schlekeway can give ASSE members a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities resulting from implementation of the new standard.

#1. Now that A10.48 has been approved, how do you see NATE members using the standards in regards to best practices, federal/state regulations, and other voluntary national consensus standards? Specifically, how will NATE members use this standard from the perspective of regulatory compliance/performance?

A10.48 is a consensus standard, meaning that stakeholders from a diverse group of companies and organizations came together by compiling the industry’s best practices and writing them into a standardized format. This information was then reviewed, debated and selected based upon the best methods The A10.48 represents a comprehensive effort that places all of the communication tower processes, procedures and protocols in one location. Besides becoming an indispensable resource for tower contractors, it will also serve to describe to OSHA what contractors are adhering to from a worker safety and quality standpoint. It is certainly our desire that OSHA will adopt the A10.48 Standard to simplify their understanding of the tower industry.
NATE is opening that door of opportunity now with our counterparts in the federal government. NATE believes the comprehensive A10.48 standard will be the single best source for the entire industry when it becomes available in the marketplace.

This standard will ultimately serve as a “one-stop shop” resource and make it much easier for companies at all layers of the contractor chain to find the best practices information that impacts their daily work at a tower site. The standard will provide the “road map” for companies to adhere and serve to standardize the processes, procedures and expectations from a construction, maintenance and use standpoint.

#2. One of the significant issues with tower construction/demolition has been the issue/concern of contractor management and performance. A10.48 was specifically written to address some of the contractor issues we are seeing in this country. What are your thoughts on when and how this standard will impact contractor safety practices? For example, do you see a scenario where potential contractors are rated against the requirement of the standard similar to how we see other companies use A10 Standards in regards to performance and measurement?

Absolutely. NATE has a great relationship with the QuEST Forum organization that is known on an international level for their ability to benchmark quality practices to existing standards. We believe that the A10.48 Standard will allow both NATE and the industry at-large benchmark and track key performance indicators (KPI’s) that ultimately will allow individual companies to compare their performance to other companies. This process of benchmarking performance will obviously take time in order to allow for reporting based on the new A10.48 Standard’s adoption in the marketplace.

NATE currently is tracking certain performance indicators through our signature STAR Initiative program. The STAR Initiative is a program that gathers site-safety audit data from participating member companies on a quarterly basis throughout each year. This program annually produces
tangible audit data that allows NATE the Association to promote the efforts of the industry’s best contractors. Over time, I could envision a scenario where elements of the A10.48 Standard are included in the STAR Initiative audit documentation requirements.

#3. Voluntary national consensus standards are almost never approved via a unanimous vote. This standard is no different than others – what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the standards?

The strengths are numerous and it speaks to the depth of this resource due to the many construction and maintenance activities outlined in the standard that have never been described before. The only weakness from my vantage point will be those in the industry that fail to take advantage of this invaluable resource by utilizing it as a primary tool in their daily work activities. Only time will tell how quickly we can change attitudes from “this is the way we always did before” to “this new A10.48 Standard makes perfect sense”.

What other documents do you think OSH professionals working with tower exposures and risks will need to use in order to move efficient/effective programs forward.

NATE has many safety documents and best practice resources available to the industry that have been developed by our team of subject matter experts in order to enhance worker safety and quality. The NATE Qualified Contractor Checklist is a great resource that combines the business fundamentals that define the best contractors in the industry. This resource should be utilized at all times when vetting contractor companies. The NATE Tower Climber Training Standard (CTS) 4th Edition is one of our most popular resource documents that outlines the training requirements and best practices information for various levels of climbers and rescuers in the industry.

Additionally, the TIA 322 Standard will perfectly compliment the A10.48. A little background is necessary. TIA 1019-A was a combined “engineering” and “use” standard. The “engineering” elements of the TIA 1019-A will become TIA 322 and the “use” elements of TIA 1019-A are contained in the
new A10.48 standard. This will provide more clarity to the industry. We now have the best of both worlds. Perfect harmony was achieved with A10.48 and TIA 322. Both standards are scheduled to be released at approximately the same time and will be made effective January 1, 2017.

#4. One of the biggest issues/concerns that impacted approval of the standard addressed the issue of “riding the line”. An extensive presentation was made to A10 members about why this practice should be permitted for tower construction and demolition safety operations. Please give us your thoughts on this specific application from both the positive and negative perspective and why “riding the line” is permissible for tower related work.

NATE has worked very hard through the years to educate OSHA officials, and industry stakeholders on the benefits associated with “riding the line” or “personnel hoisting to and from the workstation” when working on a communication structure. Hoisting personnel to and from the workstation has been described and accepted by OSHA since 1999. The latest version was passed July 17, 2014 is known by CPL 02-01-056 “Inspection Procedures for Accessing Communication Towers by Hoist”.

The practice of hoisting personnel is extremely important to NATE from a safety, quality and efficiency standpoint. Personnel hoisting reduces the amount of repetitive climbing stress that is placed on tower technicians working at elevation. This practice also allows workers to conduct their tower construction and maintenance activities more efficiently.

The analogy I like to use to demonstrate this is to have folks imagine if your office was on the 50th floor of a skyscraper building. Now think about if your building did not have elevators and you were required to walk up and down the stairs 3-5 times per day. Now, imagine that walk with approximately 50 pounds of equipment and tools on your back! This hypothetical scenario would not be conducive to working safely or efficiently!
The industry is proud of the fact that there has never been a documented case of injury or fatality when the hoisting personnel procedures were properly followed.

#5. One of the other significant issue(s) deals with the issue of fall protection and fall restraint. This standard does address fall protection/restraint to some extent and does work in conjunction with other recognized voluntary national consensus standards such as Z359. We know from data that falls is a significant risk/exposure for the tower industry. How do you see this standard changing how the tower industry addresses fall protection/restraint issues?

You are correct in that falls continue to be the most significant worker hazard that confronts the industry’s elevated workforce. While the correct processes and procedures for fall protection and rescue compliance are well known, I anticipate that the A10.48 Standard will provide an accessible “road map” for both the employer of the company and the crew leader at the tower site to follow in order to ensure fall protection compliance. The goal is zero accidents and injuries. Will the industry achieve that goal? A good first step is reading, following and breathing the new A10.48 on a daily basis.

#6. One other significant area of controversy dealt with the scope of the standard in that it also addressed maintenance. How do you see this standard working in synergy with other voluntary national consensus standards addressing maintenance related issues?

A large percentage of the work currently being performed on communication structures is of the maintenance variety so it is vital that maintenance activities are part of the equation. Being part of the A10 family of standards is a great opportunity for the industry to understand how the other standards work in conjunction with one another. Great effort was made to incorporate, by reference, other standards that already address well-established industry best practices. Regarding the CPL 01-02-056 on “personnel hoisting“ we have OSHA to thank for combining both maintenance and construction activities in the latest directive. There is no better illustration of industry
working with regulators to create common sense compliance initiatives. Communication towers provided just the right landscape for OSHA to look at the industry best practices for construction and maintenance and realize that combining heretofore separated activities into one made sense. OSHA may find other industries soon follow NATE’s example to help regulators do their job better.

#7. The Professional Engineer (PE) plays a significant role in regards to reviewing, approving, and stamping engineering plans. Do you see this standard also being used on an extensive basis by the engineering community?

Yes, the committees for TIA TR-14.7 and the A10.48 have been in communication over the years to align the TIA Standards for tower design; this is demonstrated by the outgoing TIA 1019-A transitioning into its replacement name, the TIA-322.

NATE Board of Directors member John Paul Jones currently serves on the TIA TR14.7 Committee and NATE owes a great deal of gratitude to the engineers and committee members of the TR14.7 for their contributions to the process. Sadly one of the brightest and respected structural engineers in the industry, Ernie Jones, passed away last year. Those involved know how vital Ernie was in his dedication to the communication tower industry.

#8. The standard will have an effective date of January 1, 2017 – what are your thoughts on the timetable and how long do you think it will take before the standard is used on an extensive basis?

Educating NATE members, industry stakeholders and government officials about the new A10.48 Standard is a top priority for the Association. NATE plans to aggressively promote the standard and co-host webinars and other tutorials in order to get the industry up to speed. I would also anticipate that the A10.48 Standard will be a point of emphasis at the NATE Unite 2017 Conference in February 2017 in Fort Worth, Texas. The Association also plans to actively publicize the sale of the new standard to the industry to
encourage companies and stakeholders to purchase this resource when it becomes available.

#9. Any final thoughts or ideas in regards to use and implementation of the standard?

The A10.48 Standard is a “game changer” for the industry and both NATE and the National Wireless Safety Alliance (NWSA) certification organizations plan to develop an unprecedented outreach program in order to bring awareness and establish the new A10.48 as the definitive resource for the entire supply chain. Carriers, broadcasters, vertical real estate companies, general contracting firms, insurance companies, tower contractors and consultants will all benefit from this new standard.

Todd Schlekeeway is the Executive Director of the National Association of Tower Erectors. Todd can be reached by phone at (888) 882-5865 and by e-mail at todd@natehome.com. To learn more about NATE, visit www.natehome.com today.

For more information about the ANSI/ASSE A10.48 Standard please contact Tim Fisher on the ASSE staff at TFisher@ASSE.Org