

IUOE Local 158: All-season Training Now Available Thanks to Vortex Simulator

Albany (NY)-based IUOE Local 158 represents heavy equipment operators, mechanics, and surveyors in Upstate New York's construction industry, as well as stationary engineers who work inside buildings performing all types of facility maintenance. It also has many members working in shops, quarries and airports, in addition to a growing number of public sector units.

The IUOE has been representing Operating Engineers in Upstate New York for well over a hundred years, but during many of those years, training opportunities have been frozen for at least 4 months out of every 12 — with heavy winters being a standard occurrence in the Northeast.

Whereas previously, Local 158 was restricted to classroom learning from November to February, now it has a virtual training yard available 365 days a year — snow or no snow.

What makes this year-round training possible is a Vortex simulator from CM Labs Simulations. With software for training excavator, rough terrain crane, crawler crane, and flat-top tower crane operators, a single simulator helps the Local to provide training for a full fleet of equipment throughout the winter, although the simulator gets a fair amount of use throughout the year.

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Bill Gray, Training Director for Local 158 District 106 in Albany, New York, says that training on the Vortex simulator is also more convenient during heavy rain days, as an alternative to digging in the mud.

Not only does the Vortex simulator open up new training possibilities, it's also resulting in faster, more effective training for apprentices, says Gray. The time savings and operational efficiencies that have been measured in the aviation and ports sectors are starting to attract attention in the construction industry as well.

“It's much faster to train on the simulator,” Gray explains. “You're not just putting them in a piece of machinery and hoping for the best. On the Vortex simulator, you get immediate feedback from the instructor. The turnaround time of learning is half of what it was.”

Gray believes that simulator training effectiveness is also enhanced by the reduction in stress levels — not just for the instructors who otherwise would need to keep a watchful eye on novices operating hazardous equipment for the first time, but also for the trainees themselves.

He points out that the simulator really allows trainees to perform at their best: Operators who have had seat time in the Vortex simulator, with an instructor by their side, are safer and more productive in the long run, he says.



About IUOE Local 158

On January 1, 2011, three autonomous Local unions merged to form Local 158. Local 106 (Albany), Local 545 (Syracuse), and Local 832 (Rochester) became Districts of the newly formed Local. All three locals have Vortex simulators.

The Situation

In the Northeast US, it is common for training organisations to suspend outdoor training for at least 4 months of the year.

The Solution

Thanks to the versatility of Vortex simulators, plus built-in exercises designed to train real operators, Local 158 is now able to train year-round.

A Full Fleet on a Single Simulator

The ability to swap machines is also a key consideration for the Local, as their training space is limited. From this perspective, Vortex simulators are ideal. As the first company to develop swappable controls, CM Labs has made it easy to switch controls and pedal sets in just minutes.



Indeed, CM Labs' full catalogue of cranes and heavy equipment training packs can be run from a single simulator. This includes training packs for Mobile Crane, Flat-top Tower Crane, Luffing Tower Crane, Crawler Crane, Excavator, Wheel Loader, Backhoe, Motor Grader, and more.

Local 158 has had prior experience with simulators, but the Vortex simulator is the only one that provides the complex training required for operators to develop skills that transfer to the worksite.

"We have seasoned operators that are some of the best in the country get on this thing," Gray says, "and they can't believe how useful these learning exercises are for trainees in terms of complexity. That says a lot for what CM Labs has done."

The Vortex software simulates the real behaviour of cranes and earth-moving machines, including, rigging, cables, and loads, and soil behaviour, all validated against empirical and engineering data. Vortex simulators also track and log performance metrics, such as cycle time, fuel consumption, pendulums, collisions, failure to protect others on the worksite, and more.

Local 158 joins other IUOE Locals across the USA and Canada in leveraging Vortex Simulators for training as well as recruitment, and Gray says that the time is ripe for wider adoption in the construction industry, especially considering the cost savings.



"All in all," Gray concludes, "the Vortex simulator provides an exceptional training assist for the Operating Engineers." The technology is so far advanced now, he adds, that it no longer makes sense for any organisation to defer adoption of simulation as a training aid.

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