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Inspector Arrested In Wake Of Crane Collapse

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NEW YORK -- A city inspector has been arrested for lying about checking on a construction crane just 11 days before it collapsed, killing seven people in a dense neighborhood, officials said Thursday.

Edward Marquette, 46, was arrested on charges of falsifying business records and offering a false instrument for filing, buildings Commissioner Patricia Lancaster said.

- **Images: Fatal Crane Collapse**

"We will not tolerate this kind of behavior at the Department of Buildings," Lancaster said at a news conference. "I do not and will not tolerate any misconduct in my department."

Marquette, who earns \$52,283 a year as an inspector in the department's division of cranes and derricks, was arrested while being questioned Wednesday night, said Barbara Thompson, spokeswoman for the Manhattan district attorney.

Dressed casually in a black leather jacket, Marquette did not say anything during his arraignment in state Supreme Court and was released without bail. If convicted, he faces up to four years in prison. His lawyer, Kate Moguletsu, had no comment.

The Department of Buildings said Marquette conducted 423 inspections at 76 construction sites, mostly in Manhattan, over the past six months.

The deadly accident occurred last Saturday when a crane about 20 stories tall broke away from an apartment tower under construction and toppled over, killing six construction workers and a visitor in town for St. Patrick's Day. Two dozen people were injured.

"Based on the preliminary findings of the ongoing investigation, it is unlikely that a March 4 inspection would have prevented this horrific accident, which we continue to believe was caused by human or mechanical error during the crane jumping operation on March 15th," said Lancaster. "Regardless, Edward Marquette's behavior is reprehensible." **(Click on the video to your right to watch the full news conference.)**

Officials said a complaint about the crane was logged on March 4 to the city's 311 hot line, and Marquette said he inspected it. It was later determined he had not.

In addition to suspending Marquette, Lancaster ordered an immediate inspection of all cranes checked by Marquette over the last six months.

The crane collapse caused a swath of destruction along a full city block near the United Nations, pulverizing a four-story brownstone and damaging at least seven other buildings.

The gigantic piece of machinery toppled over when a 6-ton steel collar used to secure the crane to the building came loose, plunging into another collar that acted as an anchor. Without that support, the spindly structure came tumbling down with terrifying force.

Lancaster said it is highly unlikely that a March 4 inspection would have prevented the accident because the parts of the crane that failed on March 15 were not present then. She said the crane was inspected on March 14, the day before the collapse.

The collapse followed weeks of complaints by people in the neighborhood that the crane didn't appear safe. Bruce Silberblatt, the retired contractor who called in the complaint, said he was stunned by the arrest.

"My first reaction was astonishment. My second reaction is anger that a person would have the gall to do this," said Silberblatt, who is also vice president of the Turtle Bay Neighborhood Association.

City officials would not discuss why Marquette failed to carry out the inspection.

Investigators first interviewed Marquette on Sunday and obtained a copy of his route sheet. He told the investigators that he had conducted the March 4 inspection and that it revealed no problems with the crane.

Marquette was also listed in city records as having responded to a Jan. 22 complaint by another caller who said there appeared to be insufficient safety measures in place to protect workers assembling the crane. Marquette said in his report, filed on Jan. 24, that he examined the crane and decided that no violation was warranted.

That inspection report is among those being investigated by the city.

Other complaints about the crane's safety were called in by neighborhood residents on Jan. 10 and Feb. 11, according to city records.

The contractor, Reliance Construction Group owner Stephen Kaplan, declined to comment on the arrest and referred inquiries to a company spokesman in New York, who did not immediately return a phone message.

A publicist for the East 51st Development Company, which owns the site, said the developers had no comment on the arrest.

Neighborhood residents said they weren't surprised by the arrest.

"It makes me very suspicious of the whole situation. I'd like to feel that it's safe to live in this neighborhood with all the construction going on," Sandra Graham said. "If he's been arrested, I think he should be made an example of."

A construction worker, speaking on condition of anonymity, told NewsChannel 4 that he thought the **crane was not properly bolted to the ground.**

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