

A guide to the European Crane Operators Licence (ECOL)



Introduction

The new European Crane Operators Licence is steadily gaining recognition across Europe as both national authorities and individual companies understand its benefits.

Up to now, each European country has had its own rules for the professional competence and certification of crane operators. These rules range from compulsory to optional and even to no rules at all.

The differences can lead to confusion, have a negative impact on safety and make it difficult for crane operators to work in different countries.

For this reason ECOL was created by ESTA, the European Association of Abnormal Road Transport and Mobile Cranes. ECOL is committed to developing a new system to raise overall crane operator skills and to produce safe and qualified crane operators throughout Europe.

It is ECOL's ambition to:

- enable every crane operator in Europe to demonstrate that he or she meets the minimum requirements of the industry.
- enable every crane operator to exercise his profession in any European member state, without having to attend multiple unnecessary retraining and examination sessions.
- enable every employer to assess the qualifications and experience of any operator applying for a position.
- enable every site or plant manager to check the qualifications and experience of any crane operator who enters his construction site or plant.



What is ECOL ?

ECOL is aimed at the operators of mobile cranes as defined in the EN13000 construction norm. Operators of tower cranes and overhead cranes are not yet included.

The ECOL system sets a standard for the training and examination of operators; it also sets a standard for the content and quality of the training and examination administered. The training itself is done by local training institutes established in various European countries. The institutes also arrange a local examination.

The ECOL standard has different training programmes for novice operators and for operators who already have a national licence and a number of years' operating experience. A precondition for taking part in an ECOL training and examination is that you are at least 18 years old and hold a valid EU class-C driving licence [truck driving licence].

Once licensed under the ECOL programme, an operator is required to register their experience in the SkillRecord registration system on a weekly basis. This registration involves the type of crane operated and the type of work performed. This allows the operator to prove their experience to new employers or new clients.

Who has joined ECOL so far?

At the time of writing, four training institutes have joined the ECOL system - EUC Lillebælt in Denmark; Sarens in Belgium; Mammoet in the Netherlands; and Liebherr in Germany - and ECOL has received applications from four more, two each from Belgium and Germany.

The organisation can now offer training in English, German, Danish and Dutch. Mutual recognition agreements are already in place with TCVT in the Netherlands and BCACS in British Columbia, Canada. Talks are close to completion for similar deals in Germany and Denmark and are in progress with Irish and Spanish authorities.

Such agreements involve ensuring that standards of the national licence and ECOL are fully aligned. Once they are, an ECOL licence and the national licence will be interchangeable and operators holding them will be able to work in all ECOL-recognising territories without the need for additional training or qualifications.

How to join ECOL as a training or examination institute ?

Training or examination institutes wishing to provide ECOL crane operator training or execute ECOL examinations, should apply to the ECOL foundation and take the following steps:



- Sign a participant's agreement with ECOL;
- Have their training/examination scheme “validated” for compliance by ECOL;
- Register their trainers/ examiners to take the ECOL examination;
- Arrange certification of their training/examination facilities, equipment, and training design by Lloyd's Register.

After successfully completing the above steps, a training institute can give the ECOL operator training and register applicants for examination. Likewise, an examination institute can execute the ECOL examinations. Where the term “institute” is used, this also refers to self-employed individuals who can qualify as trainers or examiners as well. However, it is a requirement of ECOL that the training and examination institutes should have no personal relationship or business dependency.

How to get an ECOL licence

1. Novice Operators

Novice operators with no previous experience are required to follow the ECOL training programme at an ECOL certified training institute before being examined.

Students are required to demonstrate they have a minimal command of the English language, required for communication with the ECOL Foundation.

The ECOL training consists of a theoretical and a practical part, both of which last a minimum of 120 hours.

Currently there are two types of practical training programmes – training in a school or in-company training.

School training: The practical training is administered in a school setting using a modern mobile crane and with two students supervised by one teacher. Students alternate as crane operator and rigger during the practical training. The training lasts 120 hours.

In-company training: The practical training is given during an “apprentice programme” in a company. The apprentice programme and the company in question have to comply with the requirements of the ECOL standard and a logbook has to be kept during the practical training, recording the assignments executed.

The compulsory documented minimal training time in-company is 240 hours and the in-company trainers or mentors of the apprentice should themselves have an ECOL licence. The in-company training ends with a 40 hour practical finishing course in a school setting.



2. Experienced Operators

For an experienced operator, it is possible to follow an ECOL programme with a reduced duration. The training time required varies according to different levels of experience and is as follows:

- Crane operators with less than four years (48 months) of operating experience have to do the full training and examination.
- Crane operators with four to eight years (49 to 96 months) of operating experience have to do three-weeks of training, consisting of 40 hours practice and 80 hours theory, and take the examination.
- Crane operators with eight or more years (more than 96 months) of operating experience have to do one-week of training, consisting of 16 hours of practice and 16 hours of theory, after which they will take the examination.

Operators applying for a reduced training duration should contact an ECOL training institute to have their Reduced Training Time application prepared and sent to the ECOL Foundation. An application for a reduced course duration on account of previous experience requires the operator to demonstrate that:

- they have a national licence;
- they can show the record of their experience (employment as operator) signed off by previous employers

The ECOL Foundation will charge a fee for assessing the application.

Costs

Training

Since ECOL does not administer the training itself, the costs of a training programme are determined by the local ECOL-certified training institutes. These costs can vary based on the duration, the type of program and the country the school is based in.

Examinations

Under the ECOL programme, the examination is carried out by independent examiners. Usually the education institute arranges the planning of the examination in consultation with the ECOL Foundation. The costs of the physical attendance of the examiners is covered by the training institutes in their costs for the course.

The examinations costs charged by the ECOL Foundation to the candidates are:

- Theoretical examinations: €125
- Language examinations: € 50
- Practical examinations: €150

If the theoretical, language and practical examination are taken on the same day at the same location there will be a reduced cost for this combined examination of €225.

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After successfully passing the examination the candidate will receive an ECOL licence. The ECOL licencing fee is €250 which includes the free use of the experience registration system for a period of five years.

How long is an ECOL licence is valid for?

An ECOL licence is valid for a period of 5 years after which renewal is required; if the operator has met the requirements to keep the licence valid, they will receive a new licence without further training or examination. If one or more of the requirements have not been met in the five-year period that the ECOL licence was valid, they will need to retake the examination.

What competencies are required in the licence approval process?

All competences needed to safely perform work as a mobile crane operator are laid down in the "ECOL Learning Outcomes" document that is made available to participants upon joining ECOL. Participants also need to speak English up to a minimum level (CEFRL level A2) in order to be able to communicate with the ECOL Foundation.

How is ECOL run?

The structure of ECOL consists of a Supervisory Board, an Expert Committee and a Management Team.

The Supervisory Board is the governing body, the Management Team is responsible for day-to-day operations and the Expert Committee is responsible for advising both the Management Team and the Supervisory Board on the training and examination content and execution.

Initially, ECOL was funded by ESTA, the European Association for Abnormal Road Transport and Mobile Cranes. During the development phase of the project, ECOL applied for and received a grant under the Europe's Erasmus+ programme for adult education.

From 2019, ECOL has been funded by contributions from the participating organisations and the registration fees paid by operators.

How has ECOL been received to date?

Clients and contractors have been very supportive of the ECOL project.

One site manager from the wind energy industry said: "We have to be honest. There are currently people out there who are operating a crane who should not be. As a client, often you do not have a clue who is sitting in the crane. ECOL is a tremendous step forward and could improve safety a lot"

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A heavy lift manager in the petrochemical industry said that he thinks ECOL is a tremendous idea. "As an industry client, we have long struggled with the problem of judging whether a crane operator is truly qualified - and qualified to do what."

Ton Klijn, ESTA Director and a member of the ECOL Supervisory Board, said: "ECOL has had a successful year and is beginning to become more widely accepted across Europe."

"Now a critical target is to engage with our industry's major clients to persuade them to support ECOL and for them to understand why it is in their interests to use ECOL-qualified crane operators."

He added: "And of course we need the operators themselves to become ECOL qualified."

Further information

For more about the European Crane Operators Licence, go to www.ecol-esta.eu or contact ESTA directly via www.estaeurope.eu.