When does a telehandler become a mobile crane?

Telehandlers (Rough Terrain Telescopic Handlers, covered under ASME B56.6) are very versatile pieces of material handling equipment. It can pick up loads on its forks and safely move over rough terrain. Due to their adaptability and ease of operation, they have always been very common on construction sites and have been slowly finding their way into the manufacturing and other industries. As with all material handling equipment, load charts are available either in the cab or in the operator’s manual so that the operator knows how much weight can be lifted to what elevation. The operator must be trained and qualified to be able to assess the working conditions so that the appropriate equipment is used.

A wide variety of attachments are available to assist in the safe picking and placement of various load sizes and weights, including jibs fitted with a hydraulic winch. The addition of this attachment (G or H pictured below) now allows the telehandler to perform as a mobile crane. The operator designation has also gone from a qualified operator (forks or basket) to a certified crane mobile crane operator (jib and/or winch). Extreme caution must be taken when using these attachments because the original load charts may not apply when lifting and moving loads. Other operating conditions will also change to increase the hazard of the pick; center of gravity of the machine, boom deflection, flexing of the equipment components or side loading. In other words, the telehandler is now acting as a mobile crane and the operator must be able to recognize the changes in load handling and equipment stability.

As with any piece of equipment, employers must ensure that their operators are either qualified or certified and authorized to work safely with telehandler operations.