

CONVERSATION

Cynthia Cuenin

General Manager
Tempest Group

“We specialize in and focus 100 percent on the safety and quality service to wind-turbine elevators”

What is Tempest Group, and what is your role in it?

Tempest group is the first full service wind-turbine elevator company, as far as I know, in North America, and it probably goes farther than that. We come from an elevator background, and we specialize in wind-turbine elevators. We came into this industry with more of a different mindset about the basic safety and maintenance procedures on this equipment than has been used in the past. We brought some of the highest safety standards that we use in the elevator industry and applied that to the wind industry.

My basic business plan is much different than maybe one from somebody who came from the wind industry and developed a company such as mine. Because, obviously, coming from the commercial elevator industry, we have very strict standards when it comes to safety. We don't manufacture equipment or parts. We're not a manufacturer, which, in my opinion, gives our clients a greater advantage, because we are not really beholden to any manufacturer to sell parts or to push parts or any modernizations that they don't need. So, we can save them a little bit of money there.

We strictly use elevator mechanics. My mechanics are wind-certified elevator mechanics through the elevator industry curriculum, which is five years of



an apprenticeship program, so I would be very much at ease in saying that we probably have the highest skilled labor out there working on this equipment. I'm proud of our mechanics. They really know what they're doing. Working in the wind industry for the last six years, we've come across quite a lot of hair-raising episodes, so we've managed to go in there and take care of a lot of situations for our clients.

What aspects of the wind industry made it a good direction to move into?

I was actually getting ready to open a traditional elevator company when I

learned about the wind industry and the fact that they did have elevators in the towers. And I started doing research about the equipment and standards and things of that nature and got much more involved within the safety aspects and the code of the equipment. Wind obviously is a young, a very rapidly growing industry, and I certainly think renewable energy is going to become more and more dominant in the near future. Towers are only getting bigger; 100-meter towers on land are becoming more of the norm. As they actually grow from that, they're going to have to put elevators in. Most towers that are 100 meters or higher do have an elevator in them. So as these things get bigger, there's going to be more demand for elevators to go faster and respond more like we're used to seeing in the commercial elevator sector, which would put us in our area of specialty and our expertise. The bigger they get, the more elaborate the equipment, the more need for highly skilled elevator mechanics service. I believe that our company is going to be able to service a pretty strong demand that's already starting to appear.

What areas does Tempest Group serve?

We work all over the country. Because we are actually an elevator company, we are licensed in states as an elevator com-

pany where some of the manufacturers that make the equipment can't even be licensed. We have a qualified elevator inspector full time on our staff. So, I can pull a license in any state to work on elevators and inspect them. We've pretty much worked in every state in the Union. The states that are a little more heavily regulated and are going to become more regulated, which means they're going to actually apply ASME A17.8 code, which is wind-turbine elevators. We're probably going to see a greater need for our services, because we actually understand the code very well. We know how to apply it, and we work within those parameters.

We work for some wind-farm owners themselves, who have called us and said they want to use a specialized maintenance company. We also work for companies that do maintenance for wind-farm owners such as Siemens Gamesa and Nordex Acciona and do elevators for them. So, we're pretty flexible. We do know our way around areas having jurisdictions. We have relationships with the states that regulate.

What makes Tempest Group unique in the wind industry?

We are the first full-service elevator company in the wind industry that specializes in nothing but wind-turbine elevators. That's all we do. We're not really a jack of all trades. We specialize in and focus 100 percent on the safety and quality service to wind turbine elevators and that has apparently not been done before. And the fact that we are a 100-percent woman-owned and managed business.

How do you think the industry can work to make wind more diverse?

I think the upper management of the industry — the people who are the movers and shakers — need to start seeking out and actually using and hir-

ing more companies that are diverse and owned and operated by diverse groups of individuals. The mindset for me is, I guess as a woman, I do seek out other women to work. I think it does give me a distinct advantage because I have so many perspectives and ideas in my workplace because of the diversity. Because I honestly never gave it that much thought because I was never raised that there was a difference between women and men, and that you just do what you have to in order to do your job well. I've never really been intimidated by the fact that I'm the only woman in the room. It's just kind of how it's happened. And not just in the wind industry, but obviously in the elevator industry.

I think there are only four or five companies in the country that are woman-owned elevator companies, much less a wind-turbine elevator company. If procurement management companies will see that there's a difference in hiring someone such as myself and the advantages to it and what we can bring to the table would go a long way. There's definitely a lot of barriers to break down and sometimes I come face to face with situations where I say, "did they really just say that to me?" But things are getting brought to the horizon, and there is diversity in the wind industry. I work with quite a few women at Siemens Gamesa who are awesome and talented in their own right. I do believe these big companies need to try to seek out companies such as mine and try to roll with it, because we have a lot to offer.

What would you consider Tempest Group's proudest achievement?

Our greatest achievement is furthering the safety of wind-turbine elevators within the wind industry and bringing safety issues to light. I am also a member of the ASME wind turbine elevator committee for A17.8, so I actually help write safety codes for this

equipment. I'm also a new member of the AWEA standards committee, that's starting to realize there is a need for safety standards within the elevators of these towers.

Where do you see the wind industry in 10-20 years?

I don't think it's going anywhere. Wind energy and renewable energy are going to be here to stay. It's rapidly growing now, and we're going to continue to see growth. We're going to be seeing, in our country especially, more offshore wind turbines. Towers are getting taller and taller, which only brings more opportunity for Tempest Group.

I do believe that, right now, on the drawing board, there are elevators that are being designed to work within these very tall turbines that are going to be more complicated and more what you would say a traditional commercial elevator would look like, which will be just more opportunity for us. I think that Tempest Group's scope of work will shift in the near future as well. Because we do have elevator mechanics that are highly skilled, everything that's inside of the wind turbine from the nacelle down is something that we are capable of working on. So, I think I'm going to see our scope of work broaden to more equipment within the tower. We're used to working with high voltage on a daily basis as it is in elevators. So, when we go into these towers, it's kind of a no brainer that we can expand our services.

In the future, wind and solar are going to be the dominant source of energy in the world, I would hope, anyway, because I think that's the way we need to go. I do think that's happening, because when you look at the rapid rate of growth in the last 20 years just in the United States, it's head spinning. ♪

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