

Health and Safety

This is the last page to go to press each month, so I can make it apt. Thus I was planning to tell you a juicy tale of my spooky night on a sailing vessel taking refuge from a giant thunderstorm. However, I have just received an interesting letter that needs mentioning in this issue, and none of the other splendid items can be postponed.

The letter, from a Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) professional, concerns our cover photos from the January/February 2009 and June 2009 issues respectively. Before taking each cover in turn, he starts off by saying, "While each magazine includes extremely interesting articles, it also depicted some rather dubious attitudes towards HSE within the industry." The January/February 2009 cover shows a person working aloft erecting an antenna without adequate fall protection; as a person could fall a distance liable to cause personal injury, the measures required by the UK Work at Height Regulations (2005) should be adopted.

The June 2009 cover shows someone performing small-boat geophysical survey from a rubber boat, with no consideration for HSE despite the obviously calm weather. The HSE professional sums up:

(1) Generating high amperages in an open boat (as per the article, 18A every 2.5 second) is unwise. An electric charge entering the body and travelling through the heart (i.e. entering via the left arm) could result in injury; 0.030amp is sufficient to kill a person with a weak heart. Around 0.05amps are usually required to kill a healthy person. Above 0.1amp people actually tend to survive the shock, though there will be extensive burns (not good in a rubber boat).

(2) Poor housekeeping; numerous trip hazards which could lead to man-overboard or inadvertent disconnection of a power source resulting in possible contact with water.

(3) Inadequate appreciation of the hazards; the surveyor is not holding on or wearing a lifejacket. Any unforeseen obstruction just below the water (lumber, crocodile etc), may result in him falling overboard.

(4) Inadequate personal protective equipment (in this case, bare feet); given the housekeeping, there is potential for puncture wounds to his feet if he needs to move.

I knew that good HSE professionals put great effort into ensuring that HSE was a top priority, but I had not realised that they'd pursue their cause irrespective of location (here, the beach, and shallow water). On a more serious note: the oil & gas industry is still accountable for far too many fatalities and incidents. In 2007, according to IMCA, the industry tally was six fatalities, 4,380 cases of personal injury and 339 'lost-time injuries' (LTIs). A recent Offshore Survey conference gave the stage to another HSE professional: "The next major step forward will come from changing behaviour, not from bringing more standards".

The HSE message is a simple one: look after yourself, look after others, follow procedures and safety signs, and intervene and stop the job if it feels unsafe. Reported incidents are on the increase. However, safety does not start at the tide-line. It starts in the office, because it is there that people arrange things for the offshore industry, like putting labels on stuff, saying what's in there and the weight of the pack. Here in this office we will try setting an example by making this month's cover HSE-proof.

Enjoy your read.