



From CEO John Clegg



It is timely to remember that our offshore industry is governed by occupational health and safety laws which impose general duties of care on all those associated with facilities, especially operators and employers. The regime is regulated by a government inspectorate (NOPSA) using the safety case as the basis for the operator's permission to operate. This regime includes a requirement for "effective consultation with and participation of the workforce" in the development and revision of facility safety cases.

As 2008 draws to a close, it is a good opportunity to reflect on efforts over the past 12 months to improve health and safety of people working in the offshore petroleum sector. Some key achievements for the year which will benefit health and safety include:

- the initiation of the offshore Industry CEO Safety Leadership Forum with its aim of improving safety by 25 per cent each year
- workshops with industry hosted by NOPSA in Perth and Melbourne throughout the year including topics such as facility integrity and lifting operations; training and competency, noise issues; and development of new safety case guidance notes
- NOPSA's production and distribution of an HSR handbook
- development by industry of a unit of competence for offshore crane operations
- formation of an offshore crane operator's working group chaired by the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism
- an Independent Review of NOPSA's operational effectiveness
- establishment of an accommodation guidance working group, including representatives from industry and the workforce, to review standards of accommodation on offshore facilities.
- active promotion of health and safety at offshore petroleum operations through NOPSA's monthly CEO newsletter and a range of information leaflets for the offshore workforce

Finally, from all of us at NOPSA best wishes for a safe and happy Christmas and New Year.

Industry matters

Concern over gas releases

Continuing high rates of hydrocarbon (gas) release [incidents](#)¹ from Australian offshore petroleum facilities continue to concern NOPSA and industry. Given that gas releases are considered a leading indicator for a major accident event it is vital that industry focus on facility integrity and "keeping the gas in the pipe". NOPSA remains concerned about integrity management and the varying quality of operators' inspection, monitoring, maintenance and repair systems and their implementation. The national programme on facility integrity run by NOPSA will continue into 2009 with a focus on providing operators with detailed analysis of the overall results of the programme inspections and audits as well as individual reports on their own facilities.

Bulk handling systems present hazards

A recent double fatality which occurred in the northwest town of Broome, WA, when personnel were using compressed air to transfer material from a tanker truck to a silo illustrates the dangers of bulk handling systems. The storage tank on the truck exploded without warning. The incident is now the subject of a coronial investigation and a WorkSafe inquiry.

This tragic incident provides a warning to oil and gas operators of the hazards associated with their bulk handling systems (typically used for barite, bentonite and cement) and the need for these systems to be designed, operated and maintained in a safe manner.

Man overboard fatality report released

A report on a fatal man overboard incident on a research survey ship north-east of Australia in 2007 has been released by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB). The report points to a lack of consistent and effective implementation of a key company policy on the vessel as a contributing factor in the loss of the crew member overboard. The ATSB found that while the vessel operator had a drug and alcohol policy, it had not been effectively implemented on the vessel.

The incident highlights the importance of not only having a safety management policy but ensuring that the policy is actively implemented on board a vessel or offshore facility. The [ATSB full report](#)² is available for download.

Need for improved safety culture

Among actions by an independent panel (Baker Panel) following a devastating process accident which killed 15 people and left 170 injured at the BP Texas City refinery in 2005, was an employee survey focusing on process safety. In its findings, the panel recommended a regular anonymous survey of process safety culture and urged companies to regularly and thoroughly evaluate their safety culture, the performance of the process safety management systems and their corporate safety oversight for possible improvements. The panel noted that preventing process accidents requires vigilance... **“people can forget to be afraid.”**

Process safety involves the prevention of leaks, spills, equipment malfunctions, over-pressures, excessive temperatures, corrosion, metal fatigue and other similar conditions.

NOPSA encourages local industry to learn from the [Baker Panel](#)³ and to adopt measures to improve safety culture in the offshore petroleum industry such as implementing regular safety culture surveys.

DrillSafe forum proves popular

The popular industry-run forum [DrillSafe](#)⁴ continues to provide a supportive environment for sharing information on safety in drilling operations. NOPSA commends the organisation of this forum which meets quarterly and continues to offer a high standard of presentations and discussions which have yielded valuable ideas for participants over the years. Run by industry professionals, the forum provides a useful model for industry sharing of information. Issues which DrillSafe have focused on include behavioural safety, manual handling and a panel session *Are 'green hats' the problem?*

Survey on exposure to workplace hazards released

The first [national survey](#)⁵ on exposure to occupational disease causing hazards in Australia has been released by the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (ASCC). The survey showed that most workers in Australia who are exposed to an occupational disease causing hazard are provided with some form of control to reduce risk. Although these are positive findings, it is concerning that some workers who are exposed to hazards report that no controls for risks are provided at all. For example, around one in every five workers reported that their employer did nothing to prevent health problems caused by exposure to direct sunlight or sunburn (also see [recent report](#)⁶ on working in extremes by the Organisation of Gas Producers). Around the same number of employees reported that their employer did nothing to prevent their hearing from being damaged or to prevent problems caused by using a range of vibrating tools.

Understanding Planned Inspections

Planned inspections carried out by NOPSA inspectors verify the risk management commitments by the offshore facility operator as set out in the safety case. NOPSA's planned inspections do not involve the inspection of every 'nut and bolt' of a facility – rather they operate on a quality assurance basis. The inspections are a sampled evaluation of the safety management system and its implementation by the operator to manage the risks associated with the facility to a level as low as reasonably practicable. A new information leaflet "What are Planned Inspections?" in the Q & A format is now available from NOPSA. Leaflets are on the [website](#)⁷ or can be ordered from: info@nopsa.gov.au.

Learn by example

Here we provide examples of good and bad practice seen in the offshore industry during recent NOPSA inspections.

GOOD PRACTICE



This is a good example of signage and an audio visual alarm on an older facility

BAD PRACTICE



This is an example of incorrectly glanded cables entering this isolator located in a zone 2 hazardous area. In particular note the use of silicone to seal the cable entry.

International

Three die after helicopter crashes in Gulf of Mexico

Three people died recently when their helicopter crashed in the Gulf of Mexico on the way to an unmanned oil platform about 30 km offshore. A search failed to find the other two people on board. The US National Transportation Safety Board investigators are working with the US Federal Aviation Administration to determine the cause of the crash.

Two energy firms fined over rig worker's death

Operator [Shell UK and employer Amec Group](#)⁸ were this month fined the equivalent of \$365,000 plus \$100,000 costs each after a UK court heard how a rig worker fell to his death because proper safety measures were not in place. A 59-year-old mechanical technician had been carrying out maintenance work on stairs which were heavily corroded when he slipped through a gap in a walkway and fell five metres in 2005. The [court heard](#)⁹ that although safety assessments were carried out they did not take full account of the difficult nature of the job, the height the technician was working at and the general risks associated with working on the extremities of a rig.

Five companies to face prosecution for Buncefield explosion – UK

Five companies are to be [prosecuted](#)¹⁰ by the UK's Health and Safety Executive and Environmental Agency following the explosions and fire at the Buncefield Oil Storage Depot in Hertfordshire in 2005 where 40 people were injured.

Big persons in lifeboats

The average weight and size of persons has increased during the last two decades. The UK Health and Safety Executive has issued an [information sheet](#)¹¹ reminding duty holders to take account of the current average weight and size of persons when determining the suitability of lifeboats provided on offshore installations.

Website

New leaflet

'What are Planned Inspections?' is the latest in information [leaflets](#)¹² available on our website.

Regulatory activities

As at 17th December 2008

Disclaimer: Activity and incident quantities identified here may vary as further information becomes available. Statistics are prepared just prior to the last Friday of the month

Safety Case Assessment

December 2008				
Assessment Type	Submitted	Accepted / Completed	Rejected	Being Assessed
Safety Case NEW		1		14
Safety Case REVISED	6	1		16
Safety Case OTHER	1			
Pipeline SMP NEW				1
Pipeline SMP REVISED		1		1
Diving SMS				
Diving Project Plan				
Scope of Validation	3	1		6
Field Development Plan				2
Advice		3		
TOTALS	10	7		40

Inspections

Seven inspections were conducted in December. Some of the issues included:

- following up on enforcement notices
- general concerns about the condition of cranes and modifications to cranes
- operators' failure to close out recommendations in a timely manner

Incidents and complaints

There were 13 incidents and no complaints reported in December (to 17th December). The incidents included 10 dangerous occurrences, one serious injury and three lost time injuries.

The major incidents included:

- one serious accident – fractured leg

The significant incidents included:

- one collision – minor contact between supply vessel and facility during offloading operations
- two LTIs – two finger crush injuries
- two gas releases

- two alarms leading to muster
- one incident involving multiple shut down valve failures
- smoke in engine room, severed power cable

Enforcement

Four Improvement Notices were issued in December.

No Written Advice/Warnings, Prohibition Notices nor Prosecution Briefs were issued in December.

The four Improvement Notices were issued for the following:

- failure to undertake design life review on platform risers/pipelines
- non-compliant noise management arrangements (two instances)
- working outside the safety case - storm choke installed in well

Subscribe

[Past issues of this newsletter](#)¹³ are available from the NOPSA website. Operators and other employers are encouraged to circulate this newsletter to their workforce. Please add your details to our [distribution list](#)¹⁴ to receive future copies of this newsletter.

Find out more

¹ <http://www.nopsa.gov.au/document/Presentation%20-%20Key%20Performance%20Indicators.pdf>

² http://www.atsb.gov.au/publications/investigation_reports/2007/MAIR/pdf/mair246_001.pdf

³ http://www.bp.com/liveassets/bp_internet/globalbp/globalbp_uk_english/SP/STAGING/local_assets/assets/pdfs/Baker_panel_report.pdf

⁴ <http://www.drillsafe.org.au/>

⁵ <http://www.ascc.gov.au/ascc/aboutus/publications/researchreports/nationalhazardexposureworkersurveillancenewssurvey.htm>

⁶ <http://www.ogp.org.uk/Publications/PubPop.asp?pub=484>

⁷ <http://www.nopsa.gov.au/document/QandA%20-%20What%20are%20Planned%20Inspections.pdf>

⁸ <http://royaldutchshellplc.com/2008/11/27/shell-fined-150000-after-admitting-hse-breaches-on-north-sea-rig-which-cost-life-of-employee/>

⁹

<http://new.edp24.co.uk/search/story.aspx?brand=EDPOnline&category=News&itemid=NOED26%20Nov%202008%2020:54:10:690&tBr and=EDPOnline&tCategory=search>

¹⁰ <http://www.buncefieldinvestigation.gov.uk/press/b08002.htm>

¹¹ <http://www.hse.gov.uk/offshore/infosheets/is12-2008.pdf?ebul=hsegen/08-dec-2008&cr=20>

¹² <http://www.nopsa.gov.au/document/QandA%20-%20What%20are%20Planned%20Inspections.pdf>

¹³ http://www.nopsa.gov.au/CEO_emails/index.asp

¹⁴ info@nopsa.gov.au