



Safety Alert 06

Fatigue

What happened?

Fatigue is emerging as a significant safety risk in the offshore oil & gas industry. Two recent, unrelated incidents are being closely followed by NOPSA. There are ongoing investigations to determine the root causes. Nevertheless, fatigue is a significant contributing factor in both.

Case 1

A worker on a pipe laying barge suffered a blackout without warning and fell. The worker had no previous medical condition and had passed a pre-employment medical the day before the event. He was medivaced for treatment of cuts and bruises and underwent further extensive medical examination. The examination did not find any medical condition that could explain the blackout.

The worker had been working for at least 22 hours, including travelling. After arrival on the facility and induction he went straight into night shift. He suffered the blackout in the first shift. Had he been operating heavy equipment or machinery, the consequence of the blackout could have been far more significant.

Case 2

A service company employee with several years of experience, while performing a routine operation, suffered an electric shock and burns to his fingers. Due to communication errors and a lack of alertness and concentration, his fingers came in contact with live current.

The crew had been despatched to site early in the morning, and had been travelling and working for 21 hours when the incident occurred.

What went wrong?

A significant contributing factor for the above cases is fatigue. The effects of fatigue vary from individual to individual. They can include impaired decision making, delayed response time, inability to concentrate, reduced alertness, and blackout.

In the cases above, the site management team and / or service company's management team failed to manage the risk associated with fatigue. There was a perceived need to carry on with the job. Experts have recently confirmed NOPSA's view that effective risk

management controls must be put in place to deal with the risks arising from fatigue; however it is caused (long hours, travelling long distances to work, shift changeovers, etc).

Fortunately, there were no serious injuries or prolonged ill effects in both the above cases. However, there was the potential for serious injury to the workers or others on the facility.

Accountabilities for fatigue management obligations are specified under the *Commonwealth Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Act (Occupational Health and Safety) Regulations 1993* Part 2 Clause 4A. The duties as specified under these regulations have not been complied with in the above two cases.

Key Lessons

- Recognise fatigue as a serious safety risk that requires appropriate risk management.
- Fatigue can cause impaired decision making, delayed response time, inability to concentrate, and reduced alertness.
- Set a clear policy relating to hours of work and communicate it to management and employees.
- Include travel time as working hours.

Contact

For further information email alerts@nopsa.gov.au and quote Alert 06