

Managing offshore safety risks: The importance of Workforce participation and engagement

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A critical element of safe operations is the knowledge and skills of the workforce members themselves, being applied to risk management of all activities from concept, design, operations and through to final abandonment. As the workforce are also most likely to be exposed to the residual risks, they are also highly incentivised to ensure that these risks are being managed.

During the 2018 IRF annual meeting, Australia hosted a session on workforce engagement with each member country describing how workforce engagement is approached in their jurisdictions, with respect to their role in ensuring safe operations. While each member country has different laws pertaining to formal workforce engagement, a number of themes were common across all member countries:

- Members of the workforce are valued as a means of identifying safety issues;
- Members of the offshore workforce provide an important contribution to front-line risk assessment due to their understanding of operations. Input from members of the workforce during the early stages of procedure development leads to useful, workable procedures;
- Worker inputs to risk identification and management can usually be applied effectively directly through the workers' line of supervision and management;
- In addition, open channels of communication between the workforce and the regulator are maintained through a range of strategies; and
- The recent industry downturn has driven a change in the profile and demographics of the workforce, including a loss of experienced members of the workforce. Within this context, it is critical that regulators maintain open lines of communication with the workforce.

Despite differences in legislation between jurisdictions, there was strong consensus that positive relationships with members of the workforce, characterised by trust and open communication, provides significant value to the workforce, industry, and the regulator.

Member country case study – Australia – NOPSEMA

The Australian offshore petroleum legislation requires that members of the workforce are involved in the development and revision of facility safety cases by the facility operators. Evidence of effective workforce involvement and inputs must be provided as part of a safety case submission, and is one of the criteria that NOPSEMA considers when assessing the safety case.

Once facilities are active within Australian waters, the legislation requires facility operators to consult with members of the workforce to develop an occupational health and safety policy. The policy is intended to ensure the operator and members of the workforce cooperate to develop and promote measures to ensure health and safety on the facility. The legislation also provides for the creation of designated work groups, health and safety representatives (HSRs), and health and safety committees. These functions provide further opportunities for

members of the workforce to be involved in managing the health and safety issues that affect them.

Once selected, HSRs must attend accredited training. NOPSEMA is responsible for the course curriculum and accreditation of training providers. NOPSEMA inspectors attend training sessions to describe the relationship between NOPSEMA and HSRs, and the assistance and support NOPSEMA provides to HSRs. At the training, NOPSEMA inspectors also provide information about the inspection process, the tools used to drive compliance and improvement, and the resources available on NOPSEMA's website. Recently, NOPSEMA senior managers have been contributing to courses as a means of reinforcing the importance and value of the training.

During facility inspections, NOPSEMA inspectors meet privately with HSRs and members of the workforce, and provide them an opportunity to escalate any concerns or issues they have been unable to resolve with facility management. NOPSEMA inspectors also review the workplace arrangements that are in place to determine whether they are effective and meeting their objectives. These meetings often provide NOPSEMA inspectors with information that informs or potentially alters the scope of the planned inspection. In addition to meetings during inspections, members of the workforce are able to contact NOPSEMA directly via telephone or email, to raise concerns or seek guidance in relation to health and safety matters. All such information is treated confidentially.

NOPSEMA continues to pursue opportunities to improve the way the agency engages with members of the workforce, and to ensure that members of the workforce are aware of the support available to them through NOPSEMA. A recent example is an approach by NOPSEMA to industry and the union movement in Australia to jointly convene a workshop for HSRs as a means of providing further skill development.

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