

HSE Information Sheet

Ensuring the wearing of immersion suits in helicopter evacuation or escape to sea

Offshore Information Sheet No. 6/2008

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Introduction

This notice draws attention to problems recently experienced with helicopter evacuations in the North Sea.

Reference in this notice to immersion suits is to the suits worn during helicopter transit to an installation, and retained on the installation for the duration of an individual's stay, rather than abandonment suits which are permanently located on the installation and may provide a lower effective standard of insulation.

Background

Recent precautionary down manning events have revealed problems with the practice of keeping immersion suits in cabins instead of at the muster points. People other than those either working or sleeping in the accommodation have gone straight to the muster point on hearing the general alarm. However given that these were installations with a significant POB, the OIMs were understandably reluctant to release personnel to retrieve immersion suits having achieved a full muster.

This has resulted in people evacuating by helicopter without their customary PPE. so that a subsequent helicopter ditching could have resulted in people entering the water with a lower standard of insulation than assumed in the operator's rescue and recovery performance standards, with a correspondingly shorter survival time.

While it may be considered that evacuation plus a subsequent helicopter ditching is a low probability event, it has already happened on at least two occasions worldwide with a number of fatalities on the first occasion because personnel were not wearing appropriate PPE.

Action Required

Duty holders should, wherever possible, locate immersion suits adjacent to the normal muster points so that workers mustering from anywhere other than their cabins can don the suits without the need to return to their cabins. If this proves impossible due (e.g.) to the design of the installation, duty holders should consider revising their emergency response procedures to ensure that personnel have the opportunity to retrieve their immersion suits prior to evacuation by helicopter or escape to sea.

Relevant Legal Requirements

Offshore Installation (Prevention of Fire and Explosion, and Emergency Response) Regulations 1995

Further information

Any queries relating to this notice should be addressed to:

Health and Safety Executive
Hazardous Installations Directorate
Offshore Division
Lord Cullen House
Fraser Place
Aberdeen AB25 3UB

Tel: 01224 252500
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This information sheet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.