

in depth

Passionate about ...

Safety



Nick Hough, technical adviser at IMCA, shares his passion for safety, which lies at the heart of the association's work on behalf of its members.

Safety lies at the very heart of the marine construction industry. It is core to all activities undertaken by the global membership of IMCA. It is not 'just a buzz-word', it is the strongest of commitments, with 'target zero' – not a single incident, not even one solitary example – being the ultimate goal.



If ever there was a topic about which there is a feeling of passion and commitment by an entire industry, it is that of safety and totally safe operations.

Safety is central to all offshore operations from the point of view of management, employees, and the corporate whole. Each organisation will have a slightly different way of expressing its views on the importance of good safety.

IMCA's approach is based on defining responsibilities, procedures and equipment in our guidelines. We provide helpful tools such as trials and audit guidelines as well as safety promotion materials such as pocket cards, posters and DVDs. On behalf of our members, we are a primary conduit for sharing knowledge about incidents. We also measure contractors' safety performance to benchmark companies so they know how they relate to their own peer group and other industries to encourage improvement.

The recent publication of the IMCA 2007 annual safety statistics report shows considerable improvement in members' safety standards over the years and that we are consistent with other peer groups, but highlights the need for continued further effort – there is still much to do.

■ The IMCA safety philosophy

Being an active member of IMCA involves a number of undertakings – adopting IMCA guidelines where appropriate (with safety at the heart of virtually all of them); agreeing to be audited to those guidelines by clients; furthering the aims and objectives of IMCA, with 'target zero' right up there at the top of the list; and promoting self regulation. These undertakings sit in the constitution and in every copy of every guideline published, in the membership application procedure and on the annual membership certificate. So our undisguised passion and commitment to safety is certainly highly visible!

Let's look at the responsibilities of management, of individuals and of companies.

First, management responsibilities – as the IMCA guidelines stress, this encompasses:

- taking corporate responsibility for safety and implementing appropriate systems including investment in: procedures; training and supervision; and equipment maintenance and audit
- demonstrating leadership by example
- promoting standardisation to develop common safety practice throughout the company. using the same systems at various company locations brings the benefits of familiarity and repeat behaviour
- encouraging self regulation – an industry that sets its own targets and achieves them
- investigating incidents to gain understanding and learn lessons
- investing in prevention, reporting and sharing across the industry
- encouraging good communication particularly in the multi-cultural work-place - recognising language barriers, different learning modes and cultural differences
- recognising human behaviour characteristics and their impact on safety.

Individuals should:

- take personal responsibility for their own and others safety
- co-operate with management to ensure a safe workplace
- look out for themselves and others
- behave responsibly.

Companies need to share experiences for the common good of the entire industry. The importance of this cannot be stressed enough. Sharing information on incidents can be demonstrated to save lives. All information received by IMCA on any incident, large or small, is made anonymous and then issued as a safety flash.

Companies should provide the framework for, and the overview of, the delivery of management and individual responsibility.

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■ Self regulation is key

Trade associations do not regulate in the way that legislators do. They provide guidance to members and work to update and introduce new guidelines wherever there appears to be a need. When members work to those guidelines, this is a way of self regulating, rather than looking to clients or governments for regulation. Self regulation is the logical result of action by industry participants to address a number of concerns. Self regulation is therefore generated by the industry; it is accepted by governments, regulators, clients and contractors; and it benefits all through speed, flexibility, improvements, bench marking; and aiding standardisation. 'Re-inventing the wheel' is avoided, and there is increased efficiency in crucial areas such as tendering, working and disputes.

Indeed, we regard it as so important that we've published a factsheet on the topic of self regulation.

■ The vital tools

Safety is promoted by a host of vital tools including good practice guidelines; competence initiatives; audit documents; safety flashes and incident analysis; safety statistics; and safety promotional material.

Good practice should reflect what good companies normally do. This leaves the option to be better still where required, appropriate or desired. It also sets an aspirational level for replacing poor or bad practice. The guidelines cover procedures, personnel and equipment as well as audit formats and maintenance recommendations.

IMCA's competence assurance and assessment guidance provides a framework designed to ensure that individuals have the training and experience to complete their work. They should be familiar with the task, and thus comfortable to carry it out in complete safety. Demonstrable competence is important to employers and clients.

The Common Marine Inspection Document (CMID) is a classic example of an IMCA audit document. It was developed originally to reduce the number of audits carried out on individual vessels, together with the adoption of a common auditing standard for the offshore marine industry. It is gratifying that the CMID is seeing ever-greater adoption around the world and members are actively promoting its use to clients, sub-contractors and other vessel operators. Indeed, a significant part of the international offshore industry has accepted the CMID as the standard for vessel inspections and, therefore, when requesting copies of recent inspections expects them to be in the format laid out in the CMID.

In encouraging people to share information I have already touched on our safety flashes; sharing incident experience around the industry is vital to help avoid repeat occurrences. Our annual analyses of incidents aims to seek common causes identify improvements and again avoid any incident happening more than once.

■ Safety statistics

We have produced an annual report on safety statistics (covering fatalities and injuries) supplied by members for over ten years. The 2007 dataset is drawn from a hundred IMCA contractor members, based upon 309.6 million man-hours of work overall (252 million-man-hours offshore). This is a significant increase on the 2006 figures, particularly in the man-hours worked and the number of contributors which has increased by 35%, rising from 74 in 2006 to 100 in 2007.

These safety statistics are consistent with those of the other main industry trade associations including the International Association of Oil & Gas Producers (OGP) and the International Association of Drilling Contractors (IADC) – with details of their results included in the IMCA report.

As in previous years, data is separated into offshore and onshore activity to improve consistency. The offshore statistics cover offshore work only, whereas the onshore work covers work in such areas as fabrication yards and office work.

In 2007 the overall lost time injury frequency rate (LTIFR) and the overall total recordable injury rate (TRIR) have shown a broad continuation of the overall 'flat-line' trend of recent years, again highlighting the need for further efforts, and the importance of guarding against complacency.

In the past two years, information has been collected on fatalities and the root causes of lost time injuries (LTIs). This shows that the most common root causes are 'slips, trips and falls' and 'struck by', with 'caught between' following a close third.

Members can compare their own statistics with the whole report or company size peer groups to maximise the benchmarking benefits.

■ Careers in safety

Although I have already indicated that safety is every employee's responsibility there is a whole career in offshore safety itself. All employees get specific safety training and safety forms a large part of any other training they receive. Such knowledge and experience form useful transferable skills as employees move forwards in their careers offshore, onshore or in other industries.

'People who teach safety courses', therefore, describes one of the jobs in our industry. Others include safety inspector, safety engineer, safety supervisor, safety manager, and safety director. These roles can require or lead to professional safety qualifications.

Consultants, contractors, clients, government departments and approval bodies such as certifying authorities all employ safety personnel, so there is a considerable choice in career path. Generally, the safety qualifications of personnel from other industries are recognised in the offshore industry, but specific knowledge of the company, tasks to be undertaken and the offshore industry are required.



■ Personal safety

As our annual safety statistics show, 'slips, trips and falls', 'struck by' and 'caught between' are the most common causes of serious accidents. By means of pocket safety cards (there are now 15 in the set); colourful and eye catching posters; and DVDs IMCA continues to stress the vital safety messages. Our DVDs are now being dubbed into all the main languages spoken on members' vessels. I read with interest the recent publicity about new research suggesting Henry VIII's flagship Mary Rose sank because of a disastrous misunderstanding between its captain and his Spanish-speaking crew. We must, in our global industry, ensure that everyone understands and takes on board our vital safety information; can share the knowledge and – most importantly of all – stop anyone who is taking the wrong route.

Workers and managers have a fundamental responsibility, to stop the job if something is not right or if something important changes, together with not starting the job before a risk assessment and discussion, they must ensure that everything necessary for a safe operation is in place.

IMCA's integrated approach crosses companies and disciplines, projects and geographies from site to office and from management and supervisors to operatives. The approach works; the statistics indicate we're on the right track, but there is always more that needs to be done to reach 'target zero'. This is not merely a personal passion, but a passion held by the whole industry.

■ Further information

Full details on IMCA's work promoting safety in the marine contracting sector can be found at www.imca-int.com/safety

For information on IMCA's confidential incident reporting and analysis systems, together with report form templates, visit www.imca-int.com/incidentreports

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