

Training, HSE top IADC's list of European priorities

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IADC HAS A number of initiatives in Europe that it is undertaking on behalf of the Association's members. In addition, European drilling contractors have identified a number of challenges facing them in their day-to-day operations.



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These initiatives and challenges were the main subjects of discussion with regulators in Europe at IADC's annual meeting with regulators that took place on 8 June in Rome coinciding with IADC 2005 World Drilling Conference.

COMPETENCY TRAINING

Currently, there are five different training standards in Northwest Europe. When a drilling contractor moves a MODU from one country to another, they have to ascertain whether the training that their crews have undertaken is acceptable to their clients and to the national regulatory agency.

Generally, contractors have to arrange for their crews to attend new national training courses even if they already hold valid certificates from another country. This results in duplicate training, doubling of costs, lost efficiency and generates crew complacency and boredom from undertaking the same training time and time again.

One of IADC's initiatives is to provide a harmonized competency training program for the whole of Europe. One training program that will be acceptable to all nations within Europe instead of having individual programs per nation.

We are currently working with the North Sea Offshore Authorities Forum to develop this program, and a European training working group of about 15 contractors is assisting in its development.

Members of the group represent all contractors from the US and Europe. IADC hopes to complete development of this training program by the middle of 2007. A concept framework is already in place and IADC will fine tune it before embarking on the development of the full program.

By having one course that is acceptable to every country, costs are reduced and the operation becomes more efficient, because crews are available for longer periods.

It is anticipated that the degree of inherent complacency arising from attending repetitious training will lessen as crew training will become more focused and undertaken wherever and whenever required.

The drilling industry is making use of the latest training techniques to improve all aspects of competency, through on-the-job training, distance learning and computer based training as well as attendance at recognized training establishments.

IADC has an ongoing dialogue with regulators to communicate progress achieved and discuss future work.

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HSE CASE GUIDELINES

The second issue of IADC's Northwest European Health, Safety and Environment Case Guideline document was issued last year and IADC announced the launch of the third version of this document on 8 June in Rome.

It has been renamed IADC Health, Safety and Environment Case Guideline and will address global operations. A group of contractors in Houston and in Europe are working to make the document a more useful and user friendly standard for worldwide activities.

Although it is now a global document, most of the previous work had been undertaken in Europe, hence several of the European contractors will continue to play a vital role in its development.

Many oil companies around the world now require a document of this type and

they are looking at the European model as the basis for worldwide operations.

Additionally, regulators in Canada, Australia and New Zealand are also adopting the European model. Consequently, IADC is working to harmonize worldwide requirements and make this document more acceptable to those countries looking seriously at HSE cases.

HSE ONSHORE

At the request of its European land members, IADC is taking the Offshore HSE Case Guideline concept into the land arena in Europe. IADC is developing a sister document for land drilling operations, IADC HSE Case Guideline for European Land Operations.

However, this land drilling operation document is intended solely for Europe to satisfy specific national legislation in the region. The process began last year and is currently ongoing. The first version of the guidelines will be issued early in 2006.

CONTRACTOR CHALLENGES

Maintaining a competent work force. Competition in the market place, especially for highly trained and competent personnel, is creating various problems for many members. The financial and working condition inducements being offered to workers by organizations within the oil and gas industry and outside are creating difficulties for drilling contractors trying to maintain competent crews.

With the increased number of new drilling units being built by many contractors, trying to find crews to man these units will inevitably become challenging. The mobility of personnel eager to capitalize on the improved conditions on offer compounds this problem.

A number of drilling contractors are focusing their efforts on workplace improvements to create a more attractive environment for their crews, including enhanced working conditions and career progression. It is hoped that by implementing these improvements it will reduce the drain of such an important resource, the crew, as they become less willing to move out of the industry.

The oil and gas industry in general is no longer seen as a "glamorous" place to work and drilling units are no exception.

Consequently, school, college and university graduates are seeking less strenuous employment in other sectors with equal or enhanced working conditions and employment prospects.

Industry is rising to this challenge by marketing itself more positively at educational establishments and employment fairs, dispelling the myths regarding lack of career progression/prospects and the perceived manual nature of work offshore.

It is also embarking on re-invigorating apprenticeship schemes to attract people leaving schools or colleges without formal qualifications, such that they can receive grounding in engineering or other trades.

Individual accountability. One of the biggest challenges the drilling industry faces is instilling a level of personal responsibility and accountability among employees.

Drilling contractors are embarking on various initiatives to re-invigorate the sense of personal responsibility and accountability for an individual's action.

In particular, they are focusing on those actions that may impact on others in terms of potential detrimental effects to health, safety or operational activities.

This is seen as a significant challenge to gain acceptance that an individual is responsible for their own actions and the impact that they may have on others.

This, of course, does not detract from the responsibilities that management and supervisory staff also have to ensure workplace health and safety by monitoring activities and providing the right conditions, equipment and guidance to facilitate this.

Reinvigorating the sense of personal responsibility and accountability is being achieved through additional training, discussions and toolbox meetings on the rig.

Supervising third party contractors. Another challenge facing drilling contractors is the supervision of third party contractors working on their drilling rigs on behalf of their joint client, the oil company.

These contractors report directly to their client. However, when they are on a drilling unit the drilling contractor is responsible for the third party contractors' health and safety.

It is becoming more apparent that the level of safety awareness and competence of a number of these contractors differs significantly from that of their hosts, the drilling contractor.

In many instances, drilling contractors are not able to enforce a similar level of health and safety awareness as their own on third party contractors because of client contractual terms and conditions.

As the primary contractor and operator of the unit, governmental agencies invariably see the drilling contractor as

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the responsible organization for assuring workplace health and safety.

Consequently, the drilling industry is raising the profile of this potentially serious problem with their clients and regulators alike to ensure that the coexistence of dual standards of health and safety performance on the same unit is no longer acceptable.

Adopting European and International standards. The drilling industry is pushing for the adoption of International or European standards by regulatory agencies throughout Europe, in an effort to achieve easier movement of equipment across borders.

This issue impacts many land contractors moving their drilling units from one country to another, frequently being required to replace pieces of equipment, plant or pipe work to satisfy individual nationalistic regulatory requirements.

If countries were to adopt international or European standards and land drilling contractors had their units built or main-

tained to those standards, then theoretically it should be acceptable anywhere in Europe.

The drilling industry is pushing for all of the countries in Europe to harmonize in accepting such standards and IADC is acting as intermediary striving to achieve this challenge.

Installation integrity. Another challenge drilling contractors are facing relates to installation integrity. This encompasses integrity of aging structures (the primary structure of the drilling units); integrity of safety critical systems (well control and shutdown systems, life saving appliances, fire detection and protection equipment and installed emergency equipment); and integrity of operational systems (mud pumps, top drives, drawworks, etc).

With the increasing complexity of equipment and mechanization of drilling units, the burden of maintainability is becoming an increasing challenge for an already stretched workforce.

The key focus of many drilling contractor maintenance departments is to ensure that all critical items are maintained in a condition that they will function as required at all times.

This is posing an increased burden on a dwindling number of competent personnel, raising stress levels with potentially negative consequences.

The lack of suitably qualified personnel, whether employed directly by drilling contractors or by equipment suppliers, is a cause of much concern within the industry.

The onus is on drilling contractors to demonstrate to all European regulatory agencies as well as their clients that they are maintaining their units and these systems in perfect condition such that they will function on demand.

Drilling contractors' planned preventive maintenance programs are now coming under closer scrutiny to ensure that all critical inspection and maintenance work is undertaken in a timely fashion.

This is a 24 hour, 7 days per week task, necessitating the recruitment of dedicated maintenance teams to fulfill these programs on time.

The challenge for drilling contractors is to find the right caliber of personnel to fill the vacancies in such teams. ■