



3 SHORT BLASTS

Just when you thought we were making headway...

THE OFFICIAL BULLETIN OF THE AMOU WESTERN AREA BRANCH

TICK-TICK-TICK...

By Dan Pearson – WA Branch Secretary

As some of you may be aware, the last few months have been a bit quiet on the work front. We have heard of many projects in the pipeline but to date nothing has come to fruition with the only news being that commencement dates have been falling further and further behind.

Like all droughts this had to come to an end and we now have some dates firming up in the 3rd and 4th quarter of 2011 for the North Rankin B, Montara wreck-removal, and Origin pipe-lay projects. In addition to this, Gorgon upstream should be looking to go into full swing in the first quarter of 2012.

We are awaiting the MOU for these projects and will send out more information as it comes to hand. I am currently organizing for the companies involved to use the AMOU email list to advertise for positions on these projects.

In addition to the above projects, the Wheatstone project has received the go ahead from the EPA and it is expected that the environment minister will sign off on the plans in the near future. Reports in the mainstream media are suggesting that works on this project could start within months of the approval. We will update any news as it comes to hand.

If you are not receiving this bulletin through your email then chances are you that you are not financial and will not be receiving the job alerts as they come to hand. Membership lapses and changes to contact details can be rectified by calling Paula in the WA Branch on (08) 9335 3535. She will be more than happy to assist.

Remember that the end of month meeting is a great place to catch up with the goings-on in the industry. This months meeting will be held on Tuesday 28th June at the Flying Angel Club. Meeting starts at 1000 hours and will incorporate the AGM. Look forward to seeing you there. Reminder notices will be sent by email.

The following articles were submitted by members following discussions held at the end of month meeting. Please feel free to send in a letter of response to these articles or even better still, write an article about an issue that you feel strongly about. Names of the author will be withheld unless specifically instructed to publish.

ARE WE IMPROVING AS AN INDUSTRY OR ARE WE STILL HIGH SEAS COWBOYS?

Name Supplied.



I first started in the offshore industry in 1995 and I have recently completed a swing serving on a PSV carrying pipe to a construction barge. When I joined, the project was about 8 weeks behind schedule due to damage to the Pipe Laying Barge stinger and the abandon & recovery winch load cell. I came to the conclusion safety was compromised due to commercial pressure and the project does not stop for safety concerns.

The PSV normally sits about 10m off the pipe laying barge in DP mode discharging pipe, but the vessel is brought in closer when the crane has to reach the outboard side of the PSV.

When the barge is pulling pipe, unloading of pipe from the PSV is stopped. When the barge and AHTS vessels are in the process of shifting anchors, it was noticed that the barge would move out of position or the head would swing around towards the PSV as the weight was let off the anchor. This would sometimes close the gap between the barge and the PSV to just a few meters.

This was observed visually by the Master and deck officers onboard and was verified by the data on the survey screen. On two occasions, action had to be taken to avoid the barge hitting the PSV. Each time this happened, we would call the barge control tower and asked them if they were out of position or had changed heading. The response was always no.

The deck officers onboard discussed this issue and the Master decided that whilst anchor handling operations took place the PSV would move off to around 30m until anchors were completed then move back in and discharging pipe would then continue.

The master informed the barge control tower of this and gave the reason for his decision. The response from the pipe laying company on the barge is that they did not understand or recognize his concerns and that it was an inconvenience to the operation to move off whilst the barge was moving anchors, an operation that takes about 1 to 1.5 hrs

On the same project, I observed PSV discharging pipe when the wind was gusting to 55 knots. The operational procedures stated that the weather limits for discharging pipe from the PSV was 35 knots and/or a significant wave height of 2.2 metres. At the same time, an AHTS vessel was calling the barge to discuss discharging cargo and later came along-side in the same strength winds.

On a previous occasion, the Pipe laying barge decided to abandon the pipe to run and seek shelter from forecasted heavy weather. The barge waited until the winds were above 35knots before they started to pull anchors and attach the tow. The wind was reaching 45knots whilst they were trying to connect the tow and during the connection, the wire snatched, nearly jumped out of the Karm fork knocking 2nd Mate's hard hat off and throwing both the IR and 2nd mate to the deck!!

Whilst they were trying to shackle the barge's fore-runner to the AHTS tow wire, it bent and jammed the stainless safety pin in the Karm fork and the AHTS could not pull away. The crew were forced to get out the seven inch grinder with a cutting disc and try to cut it out. Before they got half way through, the AHTS lost the head of the ship and went down the starboard side of the pipe laying barge snapping the forerunner.

A few years earlier a similar incident occurred with the Castoro Otto, leaving it too late when the weather had reached a point where it was too rough to connect tows or retrieve anchors.

Are we to afraid to say no - we will not do that? Do we just hope it will go ok so that we do not upset the client or project companies? Are some deck officers trying to make a name for themselves? or is it; If we do not do a task in conditions that we are not comfortable in, we will be out of a job or the vessel off charter?

My recent talks with my colleagues is that we are not learning from the same incidents and they keep coming up year after year and job to job.

TECHNOLOGY – GIFT AND NIGHTMARE

Name supplied.

It is an issue so important that I needed to bring it to the attention of the members at the last monthly meeting for input and advice from people in the same situation as I find myself in.

Like everyone else on the planet I love to be able to pick up my next G telephone when I'm off watch and call my wife for news of the kids, family and to catch up with friends. Having the internet to check on the world news, do my e-mailing and search for relevant legislations or information required to run my ship is something that was not even a dream when I first went to sea over 30 years ago.

The benefits of these technologies can not be understated as we are now relying on them more and more to share the burdens of ship management, with the shore based management structures. They enable us to fast track urgent parts, stores, repairs and most importantly emergency responses to a wide range of situations.

Of late though I have found that there is a darker side to these gifts of technology;

As they have become more efficient smaller and cheaper, it seems that all of the crew regardless of their designation are bringing their own equipment with them when they join the ship. The following situations have actually happened in the space of one swing.

1. A crewman actually forgot that his telephone was still in his overalls pocket when he came onto watch and joined the deck crew in barge operations. This is in itself not a problem unless the telephone rings and the person in question actually stops what he is doing and answers the call.
2. A watch keeping officer decided that due to no traffic in the vicinity it would be appropriate to check his hotmail account while on watch. He paid no regard to the fact that small targets may not be visible on the radar, STCW watch keeping requirements or the inappropriateness of his actions. Needless to say my reaction when entering the bridge and seeing this was less than Christian and the officer in question had the nerve to offer advice on how he could be addressed and what tones could be used. (That officer is now with another vessel)
3. On duty crew using their lunch and drink break times to fire up their computers and check e-mails and personal correspondence. This has the effect of turning a 15 minute break into an hour of lost cleaning and maintenance time.
4. Watch keeping officers using their latest generation telephones to play music on the bridge while on watch. I don't think anyone has a problem with the ABC news quietly in the background however disco volume music on the bridge drowning out the radios is not on.

5. Crewmen are now spending a great deal of their time in their cabins watching DVDs and listening to music many using head phones which is I believe dangerous. When we had a fault in our fire detection system resulting in a full muster the only person not attending was the chief officer who was listening to music with headphones on and was unable to hear the fire bell mounted on the wall right beside his cabin door.
6. My vessel has a single computer for crew use as per the EBA; this computer has a wireless modem router so that all of the ships office computers can access the internet however it also allows all of the crew to access the internet from their cabins and the mess areas. There is a company policy on pornography and all crew are requested not to surf porn through this system, many still do though. When this system is infected by viruses everyone loses access. On the last two occasions of infections I have been able to rectify the problem myself using my limited skills. If the system is not repairable we would not be able to meet EBA conditions; which was pointed out to me by the delegate. Once again using my limited skills I was able to show him who had been surfing what and pointed out that neither the officers or the office were responsible for damage caused by his members deliberately accessing pornography and rendering the system inoperable through importing viruses.

Many of these issues are arising due to the technology advancing faster than we can keep pace. The crew and younger officers are all of the opinion that the equipment they are using is theirs and therefore no rule for its use other than their own are relevant. Our training systems seem to be producing a far higher ratio of bush lawyers than it is seafarers all of whom wish to grab piece meal sentences or paragraphs from regulations to make arguments for the protection of perceived freedoms.

As seafarers we are paid one of the highest wages in the country because we leave our homes and comforts behind when we go to work, we are on call 24 hours a day and we are expected to live within the very strict limits of maritime legislations and the STCW conventions. This lifestyle does result in the loss of some of the personal freedoms we take for granted when ashore, but this is a choice we all make freely and without coercion. Those younger officers and crew who wish to treat each swing as a sentence need to re-evaluate whether they wish to come to sea, for if they are going to take the money they need to meet the standards required.

I myself am implementing a strict policy of checking at each toolbox meeting that no mobile phones are in any pockets. All music and news broadcasts on the bridge are now banned including the ABC. No personal computers are allowed on the bridge at any time and no access to the internet by watch officers or crew will be permitted. I will be using the dispute resolution process

and warnings process to ensure that the safety of the vessel and crew are not jeopardized by unthinking persons. I would dearly love to be able to turn off the modem during working hours but that would render the office applications unusable and punish those off watch who have a legitimate right to access. I will however, not be repairing the damage to the public access internet again as that is not part of my work scope.

We are in need of a standard system across all vessels, unions and companies to deal with this issue before it becomes a bigger safety issue than it is already. Safety policies need to keep up with the technology and rules for the use of personally owned equipment need to be developed.

I have submitted this article in the hope that other masters and officers who have had the same problems can start to network towards a solution that everyone will be able to live with. If as an industry body we become proactive towards a solution we will be able to remedy the situation before we are smothered by another blanket of unusable legislation that will be out of date before it is implemented.