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# Offshore Firm Receives ‘Major Accident Warning’ After Group Failings in Explosion Plan

## Description

Offshore oil and gas firms in the North Sea have received a stark reminder about the importance of safety. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recently issued a ‘major accident warning’ to Apache, a company operating platforms off the coast of Aberdeen. Inspectors found significant shortcomings in Apache’s explosion prevention plan, particularly in how the company accounted for human factors.

The HSE emphasized the necessity for offshore companies to integrate human factors into their safety protocols. Human factors, in this context, refer to the interactions between humans and other elements of a system and the impact of these interactions on performance and safety.

## The Investigation and Findings

The inspection of Apache’s Forties Delta platform led HSE to conclude that the company had not adequately considered human factors in its plans to prevent fire and explosions. Mary Marshall, a principal specialist inspector at HSE, highlighted the critical nature of safety tasks on offshore installations. She stated that these tasks, if not properly managed, have the potential to trigger or escalate major accidents.

The investigation revealed that Apache had failed to take proper precautions to prevent the uncontrolled release of flammable or explosive substances during operations involving the main oil line pig launcher. As a result, Apache was issued an enforcement notice and has until November 9 to comply. The company has chosen not to appeal the notice.

## Importance of Human Factors in Safety Plans

Human factors play a crucial role in the safety and efficiency of offshore operations. According to Marshall, offshore firms must identify safety-critical tasks and understand how these tasks could be susceptible to human error. This understanding is essential for implementing measures that ensure tasks are carried out safely and reliably.

Safety Critical Task Analysis (SCTA) is a structured process that helps companies assess and mitigate risks associated with human factors. SCTA involves examining the design of equipment, detailing the tasks to be performed, and considering factors that support or hinder task performance.

## Challenges in Implementing SCTA

The HSE has noted that many offshore firms have initiated SCTA programs, but the success of these initiatives has been mixed. Common issues include a lack of sustained commitment to the programs and inconsistencies in the quality of the assessments. These shortcomings can undermine the effectiveness of SCTA and, consequently, the safety of offshore operations.

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## Moving Forward

For Apache and other companies in the sector, the warning from HSE is a call to action. Ensuring that human factors are fully integrated into safety plans is not just a regulatory requirement but a crucial step in safeguarding the lives of those working on offshore platforms. It also protects the environment and the integrity of the operations themselves.

As the deadline for compliance approaches, it is imperative for Apache to address the identified failings comprehensively. This involves not only reviewing and updating their safety plans but also ensuring that all personnel are adequately trained and that the equipment used is designed to minimize the risk of human error.

## Conclusion

The HSE's enforcement notice to Apache serves as a critical reminder of the ongoing need for vigilance and thoroughness in safety planning within the offshore oil and gas industry. By paying close attention to human factors and maintaining a robust Safety Critical Task Analysis process, companies can better manage risks and prevent major accidents.

The importance of these measures cannot be overstated. They are essential not only for compliance with regulations but also for the protection of human life and the preservation of the environment. As the industry moves forward, continuous improvement in safety protocols will be key to preventing accidents and ensuring sustainable operations.

## CATEGORY

1. Offshore

## POST TAG

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2. Forties Delta Platform
3. Human Factors
4. Mary Marshall (HSE)
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