

UK HSE: oil company fined after serious failure of elevator

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The UK HSE has fined a North Sea oil and gas operator £300,000 after three crew members descended into a water filled lift shaft on a floating platform in the North Sea causing them to become partially submerged. [See press release here.](#)

What happened?

Three workers had been descending in a lift located in one of the platform legs on the FPF-1 facility during a night shift on 10 December 2020 when the water started to flood into the lift before they reached the bottom of the shaft. The trio, who had been tasked with carrying out inspection work at the base of one of the facility's sub-sea columns, were knee-deep in water by the time the lift was able to be stopped by the workers via the emergency button.

As the three descended in the lift, they experienced a 'rush of air' before their fears of something being wrong were confirmed when the base of the lift made contact with the water. They were able to press an emergency stop button and returned safely to the main deck, with none of them sustaining any injuries.

The HSE investigation found that water marks on the lift door revealed it had reached a level of just under 1.5 metres before the lift was stopped and returned to surface. The operator's own investigation determined that the water level could have actually reached more than three metres, meaning the workers would have found it difficult to escape through the top hatch of the lift had they used the lift later and/or had not been successful in bringing the lift to a halt immediately.

What went wrong?

- There were failures of hardware during preparations to clear the inspection site of standing water beforehand.
- Incorrect operating procedures caused the bottom of the lift shaft to start filling with water.
- Due to a lack of water alarms in the bottom of the lift shaft the control room personnel were unaware that water was filling the shaft;

An improvement notice was issued and work in confined spaces was stopped by the company to allow a full review to take place.

according to IOGP's Life Saving Rules.

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