

Fatality during cable-pulling operations

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A member has reported the following incident, which occurred while a 76mm diameter wire rope cable was being pulled off of a passive reel mounted on an anchored flat top barge moored some 600m from shore.

What happened?

The cable was to be pulled around a sheave block anchored on the beach and, hence, towards a pipelay barge, which was on anchors approximately 400m from the shoreline. Because of the weight of the wire rope and the length being pulled, the pulling force itself was exerted by the pipelay barge, which was drawing itself forward on anchors. A series of 96mm diameter polyprop hawsers were linked from the stern of the pipelay barge to the wire rope cable.

The wire rope connector became jammed in the sheave while the pulling barge continued to move forward. The hawsers were stretched beyond their safe working load and one eventually snapped. The flaying ends of the ropes sprang back and killed a member of the team on the beach.

The company involved has carried out an extensive investigation, which identified the following points, recommended as reminders to all people involved in beach pulling operations:

- Every operation must be fully engineered, taking into account pulling forces, with detailed instructions for those involved setting out the methodology, risk reduction measures to be adopted and contingency procedures.
- A detailed risk assessment must be carried out by the onshore project team, following the company's procedures, and supplied to the site team.
- Where changes to the methodology are required, where things have not gone according to plan, revised processes are to be fully risk-assessed and the revised methods approved before work continues, in accordance with company procedures.
- Toolbox talks are to be used to brief all those involved in the work regarding the work to be done, risks involved, each person's role and their positions.
- Warning alarms, barriers, etc. are to be used to prevent those not involved in pulling operations from coming close to wires/ropes under tension.
- The importance of good communication between people at different

locations has been re-emphasised – in this instance, including the reel, beach, pipelay barge deck and pipelay barge anchoring control. The person in charge of an operation needs to maintain a clear understanding of movement in all locations at all times in order to clearly relate how movement at one location affects the others.

The company has restated that all personnel have the right and obligation to stop the work at any time if an unsafe condition is seen to be developing.

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