

Lithium batteries: Fire following the failure of a helicopter start power unit

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The vessel fire alarm panel indicated an activated smoke detector in the Heli admin office.

What happened?

Upon investigation, crew found the Heli admin office to be filled with smoke; they proceeded to raise the alarm immediately and inform the Bridge.

The fire alarm was sounded, and all personnel proceeded to muster. Emergency response teams were assembled and dispatched in full breathing apparatus to investigate the source of the smoke/suspected fire.

This was identified as a Portable Helicopter Start Power Unit (Lithium battery) which was located in the corner of the office and connected to a charging pack.

The unit and charger were safely removed and doused with fire hoses until cooled and deemed safe. A quick and professional response from crew prevented any further escalation and the incident resulted in no injuries to personnel.

The unit involved in the incident had been maintained in accordance with a planned maintenance regime and had displayed no signs of defect.

IOGP Life Saving Rules:



Failed unit and charging cable



Location in Heli-admin

What were the causes?

A suspected failure of unit or charger caused overheating and potential fire hazard.

Our member has been in contact with the manufacturer, which suspects that a component in the charger failed.

What actions were taken?

- Failed unit was quarantined for safe disposal or returned to manufacturer for investigation.
- The vessel has now established a clearly marked external storage area for old batteries.
- All operators using similar units should ensure they are serviceable and show no signs of defect or deterioration.

What lessons were learned?

Devices fitted with Lithium batteries such as this should not be left unattended whilst charging.

This also applies to personal devices such as laptops, tablets and mobile phones.

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