

## Energy Firm Fined £300,000 After Workers Trapped in Water-Filled Lift Shaft

An offshore energy company has been fined £300,000 after three workers became trapped in a water-filled lift shaft on a North Sea platform. The incident occurred on December 10, 2020, when the men were descending in a lift located in one of the platform legs on the FPF-1 facility. As they descended, water began flooding into the lift shaft, submerging the base and leaving the workers knee-deep in water. Fortunately, they managed to stop the lift using the emergency button and returned safely to the main deck without sustaining any injuries.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) revealed that the flooding was caused by hardware failures and incorrect operating procedures during preparations to clear standing water from the inspection site. The lack of water alarms at the bottom of the lift shaft meant that the control room was unaware of the rising water levels. Water marks on the lift door indicated that the water had reached a level of just under 1.5 meters before the lift was stopped and returned to the surface. The company later determined that the water level could have reached more than three meters, potentially making it difficult for the workers to escape through the top hatch if they had not acted promptly.

The company pleaded guilty to safety failings at a hearing at Aberdeen Sheriff Court. In response to the incident, the HSE issued an improvement notice, and the company ceased work in confined spaces until February 2021 to allow for a full review of their safety procedures. HSE inspector Ian Chilley described the incident as “terrifying” for the workers involved and emphasized that it was only due to their quick thinking that no physical harm came to them. He stated that the fine should serve as a reminder to operators of offshore facilities to be extra vigilant in adhering to health and safety protocols.

The sheriff noted that the case serves as another reminder of the need for rigorous adherence to health and safety standards in the oil and gas industry. The incident underscores the importance of proper maintenance, clear operating procedures, and effective safety measures to prevent accidents and protect workers in high-risk environments.