

Offshore drilling company fined after crane boom collapse

An offshore drilling company has been fined after a crane boom collapsed catastrophically.

Nobody was hurt in the incident on 31 March 2016 but a chaotic scene ensued after the collapse of the Rowan Gorilla VII's boom, with flying debris damaging a nearby vessel, whipping a hose out of control before it ruptured, leaving a cloud of cement dust.

Inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) described the incident as an "accident waiting to happen".

It happened offshore in the North Sea as staff were preparing to recover a faulty submersible pump. As the crane operator raised the boom to clear one of the three legs of the installation it failed catastrophically and collapsed.

HSE found the immediate cause of the crane collapse was that Rowan Drilling (UK) Limited had not checked that a limit switch, designed to prevent the crane boom being raised to the point of mechanical failure, had been correctly set.

Three of the four boom sections fell to sea between the rig and the 'Solvik Supplier' supply vessel which was pumping dry cement to the rig via a flexible hose. The crane's auxiliary hook, cables, components, and rig debris landed on the deck of the Solvik Supplier. The boom tip snagged the flexible hose, dragging it below the sea surface, causing it to rupture and whip back onto the deck of the vessel engulfing it in fine cement dust.



Damage to the lifeboats following the collapse

Although no one was injured by the incident, there were at least five Rowan employees on and around the crane at the time of the collapse. There were thirteen crew onboard the Solvik Supplier.

The HSE investigation found that safety mechanisms, designed to prevent inadvertent operation of the slew, hoist, and boom joystick controls in the port bow crane cabin had all been overridden to prevent them returning to their locked neutral position. An Improvement Notice was served on the company to remedy issues relating to the limit switches and management issues identified.

Rowan Drilling (UK) Limited, of Queens Road, Aberdeen, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) and Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 .The company was fined £130,000 at Aberdeen Sheriff Court on 21 December 2023.

HSE inspector Brian Kennedy said: “It was pure luck that nobody was seriously hurt or died as a result of these failings.

“As with so many incidents, the circumstances leading to the collapse of the port bow crane on the RGVII were years in the making and symptomatic of a

defective safety management system that allowed those conditions to exist and persist.

“This was quite simply an accident waiting to happen and illustrates the vital importance of maintaining and testing crane limit switches to ensure they will always provide the intended level of protection.”

Notes to Editors:

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain’s national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise. hse.gov.uk
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: www.legislation.gov.uk/
3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>
4. Guidance on Offshore Health and Safety Legislation can be found here: [Offshore oil and gas – HSE](#)