

Rusting rigs spark fears of oil tragedy

SHOCKING footage has emerged showing the dire state of Britain's rusting oil rigs, amid fears some could be close to collapse.

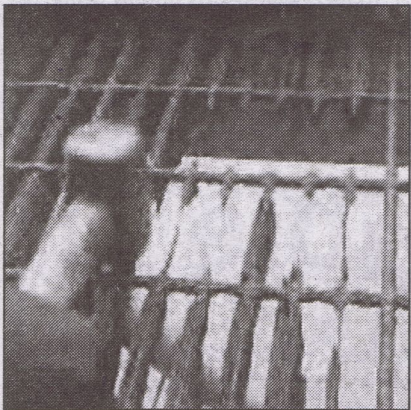
An offshore worker can be seen in the video, which was filmed on an undisclosed rig last month, hammering a hole through the floor of one of the platforms, sending chunks of the metal frame tumbling into the sea below.

The Sunday Express also obtained a damning letter from the Health and Safety Executive to Shell, after finding a "significant maintenance backlog" exceeding 15,000 hours during an inspection of the Brent C platform in July.

It warned "areas of the installation were suffering from severe corrosion" and there was a danger of some of the structure falling down "as the integrity worsens". Safety officials called for immediate assurances the firm was not putting lives at risk.

They also pointed out "redundant plant and equipment did not appear to be inspected or maintained and there is a risk some aspects may pose a dropped object threat as the integrity worsens."

Experts warn about half of the oil and gas platforms operating off the east coast have exceeded their "best before"



VIDEO: Footage shows an oil worker hammering a hole through the floor

Site deaths lead to call for reform

MINISTERS are being urged to close a loophole in the law which allows companies to cheat justice following the death of an employee.

Fatalities in the construction industry occur at the rate of one a week, on average, with 70 per cent due to management failure.

But firms are increasingly escaping punishment by going into voluntary liquidation, unionists will hear this week.

Construction workers' representatives UCATT are calling for the Health and Safety Executive to pursue company directors if an employee is killed.

They say firms would then be unable to cheat the system by ceasing to trade and reopening for business under a slightly different name.

It follows the case of a £1 fine for TV satellite installers Foxtel after Noel Corbin fell 40ft in 2008.

This summer, the Old Bailey heard that Foxtel didn't ask Mr Corbin, 29, for

By Paula Murray

dates, some by as much as 20 years, leading to fears of a major incident.

Now the emergence of the video of the rig has sparked fresh demands for the safety of operations in the North Sea to be urgently reviewed.

Some rigs need scaffolding to support failing hand railings and boards on walkways to stop staff falling through rusting metal. Bill Campbell, ex-group auditor for Shell International and now a safety campaigner, said: "The useful life of a mechanical structure can only be reached if it is maintained and inspected throughout its life, but the dominant failure for offshore installations is age-related. The footage testing gratings shows what we already know."

He added he believed many of the workers on rigs are "blissfully unaware of the risks they are taking".

More than 23 years have passed since 168 men died in an explosion on the Piper Alpha platform. Mr Campbell said it was only a matter of time before another major tragedy occurred in the North Sea. He said data showed there were 85 gas releases and 443 dangerous occurrences last year. "The probability of an undesirable event is extremely high," he said.

Last month Royal Dutch Shell battled a leak 120 miles from Aberdeen that saw 200 tonnes of oil spill into the sea.

Industry representatives Oil & Gas UK, which organised a safety summit this month, insisted the HSE's recent statistics show the number of major and significant gas leaks is falling.

Robert Paterson, health and safety director, said: "The offshore industry invests significant funds, time and energy to ensure its installations continue to remain in good repair and safe condition so that safety systems operate effectively and on demand as intended."

● SEE video: sundayexpress.co.uk

By Kirsty Buchanan POLITICAL EDITOR

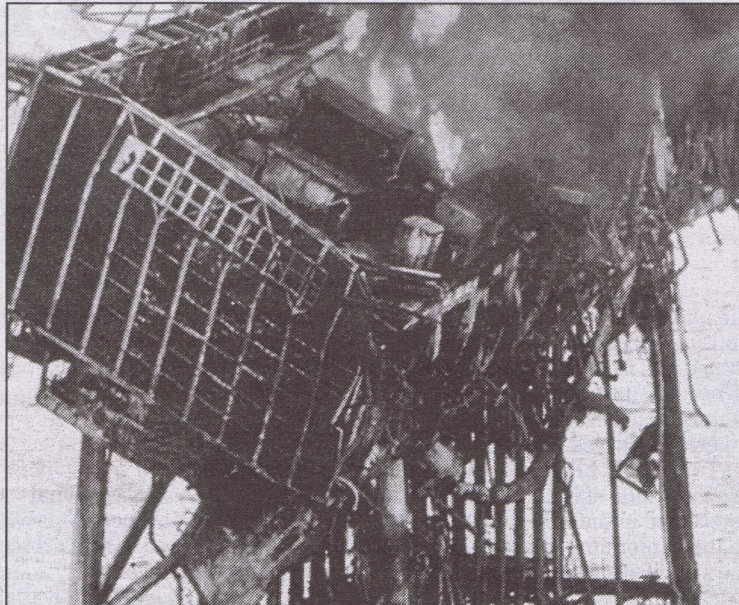
references or training certificates and didn't supervise his first jobs. Safety equipment was also inadequate.

The company pleaded guilty to health and safety breaches but, as it had gone into voluntary liquidation owing £109,000, it was fined just £1. A new company foxtel.ltd.uk is now trading.

George Guy, UCATT's acting general secretary, said: "This is simply not justice. The introduction of statutory director's duties would ensure that an individual director would be required to take responsibility ... and there could be a custodial sentence."

The issue will be raised at the Trades Union Congress in London this week.

Brendan Barber, TUC general secretary has warned of "industrial battles" over proposed changes to public sector pensions. Ten unions are in talks over a day of strike action in November.



DEVASTATION: An explosion on Piper Alpha killed 168 men in 1988

We will be independent vow Scots

By Ben Borland

AN EXCLUSIVE poll for the Sunday Express has found most Scots believe Scotland will be independent within their lifetime.

The figures back First Minister Alex Salmond's claims last week that they are part of a burgeoning "independence revolution".

The Angus Reid poll found that 42 per cent of Scots aged 18 to 54 believe the end of the Union is inevitable, with only 25 per cent taking the opposite view. Even when older voters are taken into account, most people think independence will happen - 36 per cent compared to 32 per cent, with 32 per cent unsure.

More than two-thirds of Scots also want to seize control of North Sea oil money to fund lower petrol prices in Scotland.

Sir Sean Connery, the SNP's best known supporter, last night said: "I have always believed that Scotland will become independent in my lifetime."

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