

# Oil and gas operator following incident on North Sea platform

- Water rose to workers' knees before emergency stop
- Incident was "terrifying", says HSE inspector

An oil and gas operator has been fined £300,000 after three crew members descended into a water filled lift shaft on a floating platform in the North Sea causing them to become partially submerged.

The workers had been descending in a lift located in one of the platform legs on the FPF-1 facility during a night shift on 10 December 2020 when the water started to flood into the lift before they reached the bottom of the shaft. The trio were knee-deep in water by the time the lift was able to be stopped by the workers via the emergency button.



Figure 7 – Location of Column D4 on FPF-1

## The FPF-1 Platform

Ithaca Energy (UK) Limited, the owner of FPF-1, pleaded guilty to safety failings at a hearing at Aberdeen Sheriff Court on Thursday, 12 June 2025.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found the three men had been tasked with carrying out inspection work at the base of one of the facility's sub-sea columns. During preparations to clear the inspection site of standing water beforehand, failings of hardware and incorrect operating procedures caused the bottom of the lift shaft to commence filling with water. Due to a lack of water alarms in the bottom of the lift shaft the control room was unaware that water was filling the shaft.



The lift shaft had filled with sea water and no alarm system was in place

As the three men descended in the lift, they experienced a 'rush of air'

before their fears of something being wrong were confirmed when the base of the lift made contact with the water. The three men were able to press an emergency stop button and returned safely to the main deck, with none of them sustaining any injuries.

The HSE investigation found that water marks on the lift door revealed it had reached a level of just under 1.5 metres before the lift was stopped and returned to surface. Ithaca's own investigation determined that the water level could have actually reached more than three metres, meaning the men would have found it difficult to escape through the top hatch of the lift if the workers had used the lift later and/or had not been successful in bringing the lift to a halt immediately.

HSE issued Ithaca with an improvement notice and work in confined spaces was stopped by the company until February 2021 to allow a full review to take place.



Figure 11 – Lift Entrance and Watertight Door in P-M-12

Water marks on the lift door indicated it had reached a height of nearly 1.5 metres

Ithaca Energy (UK) Limited of Queens Road, Aberdeen pleaded guilty to breaching The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998, 30 Regulation 4(1) and the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, Section 33(1)(a). The company was fined £300,000.

HSE inspector Ian Chilley said: "This was a terrifying incident for the workers involved, we are just thankful that no physical harm came to them.

"This fine should send a message and reminder to those operating offshore facilities for them to be extra vigilant.

"It was only a matter of good fortune that this incident didn't result in serious injury, or worse."

When passing sentence, the sheriff observed the case marked 'another reminder of the need for rigorous adherence to health and safety in the oil and gas industry'.

#### **Further information:**

1. [The Health and Safety Executive](#) (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We are dedicated to protecting people and places, and helping everyone lead safer and healthier lives.

2. More information about the [legislation](#) referred to in this case is available.
3. Further details on the latest [HSE news releases](#) is available.
4. HSE does not pass sentences, set guidelines or collect any fines imposed. Relevant sentencing guidelines must be followed unless the court is satisfied that it would be contrary to the interests of justice to do so. The sentencing guidelines for health and safety offences in Scotland can be found [here](#).