



Safety Alert No. 474

Contact: bseepublicaffairs@bsee.gov

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Phone: (800) 200-4853

BSEE Issues Recommendations for Safely Approaching, Entering and Exiting a Helicopter on Offshore Helidecks



Figure 1: Offshore facility with helideck

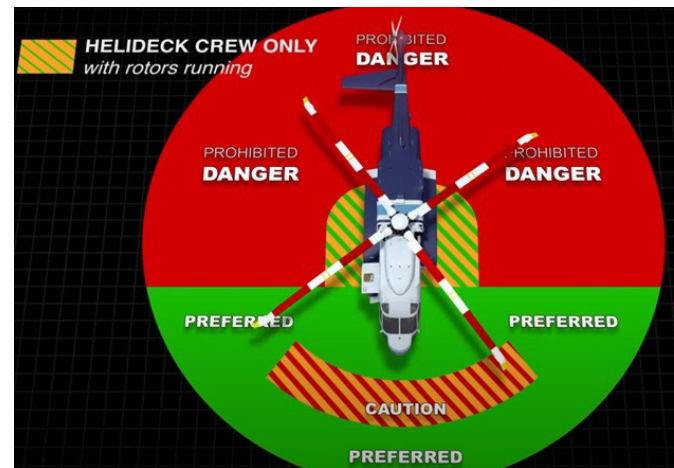


Figure 2: Helicopter Safe Zones (Not aircraft specific)

A recent incident occurring on an offshore facility's helideck during a routine crew change brought to light critical safety concerns regarding safe procedures for approaching, entering, and exiting helicopters. The management of helideck crews and passengers is a safety-critical operation that could lead to severe injuries or fatalities if not executed correctly.

The incident resulted from a combination of procedural lapses and behavioral failures that had the potential for catastrophic consequences. In this alarming near-miss event, a helicopter was stationed on the facility's helideck and a crew member approached the aircraft from the rear, entering the rotor arc area before the rotor blades had come to a complete stop. This unsafe action posed a significant threat to the safety of all personnel involved. An offshore helideck assistant repeated the unsafe behavior by approaching the helicopter from the rear, entering the vicinity of the tail rotor, and positioning themselves within the main rotor's danger zone immediately after the helicopter had landed on the facility's helideck. These incidents occurred while the

helicopter's rotors were still in motion and before the pilot had signaled clearance for personnel to approach.

Upon recognizing the incursion, the helicopter's air crew took immediate action by alerting the pilot, who was already in the process of engaging the rotor brakes. Subsequently, the air crew invoked "Stop Work Authority"¹ and took proactive steps to ensure the helideck crew fully understood the correct procedure for entering and exiting the helideck and safely approaching or departing from helicopters.

The incident underscores the importance of adhering to established safety protocols during helicopter operations on offshore facilities. Please refer to the recommendations and references provided below for comprehensive guidance on ensuring the safety of all personnel involved in offshore helicopter operations. (Reference: U.S. Department of the Interior Safety Communique (SAFECOM) 23-0234, <https://www.safecom.gov/safecom/23-0234>).

Therefore, BSEE recommends that operators and their contractors, where appropriate, consider the following:

- Not entering the helideck until the helicopter blades have completely stopped, the anti-collision lights have been turned off, and/or a "thumbs-up" signal has been received by the pilot.
- Receiving clear confirmation from the pilot, either through hand signals or radio communications, prior to approaching the helicopter or installing handrails (if the facility is so equipped).
- Ensuring helideck crew members use the designated safe entry zones corresponding to the specific helicopter type during crew access and egress. These zones are established for safety reasons, considering the unique characteristics of each aircraft.
- Ensuring personnel are familiar with and understand helicopter loading and unloading policies and procedures to prevent incidents from occurring on the helideck.

¹ Stop work authority (SWA) is a Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) program (30 CFR 250.1930) that gives workers and contractors the authority and responsibility to stop work if they observe unsafe conditions or behaviors on the jobsite.

- Ensuring safety critical operations are well planned and proper controls are in place to ensure flawless execution of the plan.
- Reviewing the policy guidelines in the company Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) manual and including area specific regulatory requirements and recommended practices.
- Critiquing operations for signs of weakness or noncompliance, and if any are identified, implementing specific actions to correct them.
- Not leaving safety to chance by ensuring the development and implementation of a facility specific helicopter operations procedure.

Additionally, BSEE reminds industry of the following information and aids to minimize risks to passengers, helideck crews, and others involved in offshore helideck operations:

- International Association of Drilling Contractors (IADC) [Safety Alert 2005-26 Safe Helicopter Operations](#).
- [HSAC RP 165](#) Air Operator Guidelines for Offshore Helicopter Operations – 1st Edition. See section 15. Passenger Control.
- [HSAC RP 1988-1](#) Passenger Management on and About Heliport Facilities.
- Video: [Helideck Management](#) (From BP per OPITO Helideck Operations Training Standards).
- Video: [Offshore Helideck Operations](#) example of pilot signal.
- Recommended training: [OPITO Helicopter Operations Initial Training](#) (HOIT) (7040). This course is designed for offshore personnel who are to be appointed to the [role of an](#) Offshore Helicopter Landing Officer (HLO) and/or Offshore Helideck Assistant (HDA).

– BSEE –

A **Safety Alert** is a tool used by BSEE to inform the offshore oil and gas industry of the circumstances surrounding a potential safety issue. It also contains recommendations that could assist avoiding potential incidents on the Outer Continental Shelf.

Category: Component Failure, Pipe Handling, Well Operations, Structural, Fire