



Safety Alert No. 490
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Delay in Publication of Derated Helideck Weight Capacity Leads to Near Miss Incident



Figure 1. Offshore Facility



Figure 2. Helideck Rating & Sizing



Figure 3. Helideck Safety Labeling

The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) has observed a concerning trend of safety incidents linked to unsafe helideck conditions and improper adherence to established protocols. A recent near-miss incident that occurred during a helicopter flight to an offshore facility that had recently downgraded its helideck weight capacity serves as a precautionary example and underscores the critical need for effective communication and protocol compliance regarding helideck operations and conditions.

Incident Details:

During pre-flight mission planning, a helicopter pilot ensured the platform's helideck could support the helicopter's weight by conducting a thorough review. This included checking the facility's helideck information, consulting the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) system, and verifying any Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs). The pilot also confirmed the helideck's published weight rating of 12,000 lbs. with the facility operator before departure. No changes to the weight rating were noted during the standard flight planning process.

Upon arrival and prior to landing at the facility, the pilot observed a freshly painted red-hatched area and a new visible weight rating of 6,000 lbs. (Figure 2) After verbally confirming with the platform operator over the radio that a helideck downgrade had occurred, the pilot deemed it unsafe to land. The pilot informed the flight operations center to revise the flight plan for a safe landing at a nearby facility.

This incident highlights the risks associated with delaying the publication of accurate helideck conditions. While the pilot's alertness prevented a potential incident, the event underscores significant gaps in communication and documentation procedures.

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

- Ensuring all helideck conditions are accurate, validated, and published, including recent updates and/or deratings, through direct communication with facility operators and the FAA.
- Verbally confirming helideck weight ratings and conditions before takeoff and just prior to landing, especially for decommissioned or modified structures.
- Ensuring operational procedures are updated to include verification with facility personnel before starting a flight to a facility of any recent helideck deratings.
- Encouraging crew members to voice concerns and verify information. Effective teamwork is essential for safe operations.
- Anticipating the impacts of any changes to facilities, ensure all notifications, required and otherwise, are made and received promptly.
- Implementing mandatory checks to confirm helideck capacities and conditions regularly.
- Reinforcing clear communication of helideck status changes to all personnel, ensuring updated information is accessible.
- Conducting regular training sessions focused on recognizing helideck markings and their safety implications.
- Updating helicopter operation protocols, emphasizing the importance of pre-arrival briefings and toolbox meetings.
- Implementing continuous monitoring of helideck conditions and markings and updating operational protocols as needed.

BSEE emphasizes the importance of adhering to established safety guidelines while fostering a culture of vigilance and proactive communication. This incident reaffirms the necessity for continuous training, open communication, and rigorous verification processes to mitigate risks associated with helideck operations.

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

- [HSAC RP 163](#) *Inspection, Maintenance and Operations of Offshore Helidecks*.
- [HSAC RP 165](#) *Air Operator Guidelines for Offshore Helicopter Operations – 1st Edition*.

- [BSEE Safety Alert No. 322](#) / *Helideck Obstructions and Compounding Procedural Errors Contribute to Five Near Misses on OCS.*
- [BSEE Safety Alert No.413](#) / *Hazards Identified in Level I Surveys not Communicated to Affected Personnel*
- [BSEE Safety Alert No. 479](#) / *Lack of Adherence to Helideck Safety Procedures Results in Series of Near Miss Incidents for additional information.*
- [30 CFR 250.1912](#) – Criteria for Safety Management System Management of Change.
- BSEE Notice to Lessees (NTL), [NTL-2021-N03](#)/*Helideck Closures and Markings*
- [30 CFR 250.890](#) – Records. (c) You must submit to the appropriate District Manager a contact list for all facilities at least annually or when contact information is revised. The contact list must include: (6) Facility helideck rating and size.

– 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: Aviation