



Piracy is on the increase and security breaches are an ever-present threat. Hugh Williams, chief executive of the International Marine Contractors Association, has advice on how companies and their staff can protect themselves from the dangers.

[Key Facts]

- Piracy and armed robbery attacks against ships rose 14% in the first nine months of 2008, compared to the same period in 2006.
- In 2005, KIMCA established a security task force to address security matters.



Put personal security first

The *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies have been enjoyed for their rollicking, swashbuckling adventures by families around the world. But out on the sea, the reality of piracy, as opposed to the mythology, is that armed attacks on ships and crews are increasingly violent, ruthless and potentially catastrophic. The effect on crews and their families can be devastating.

Piracy is straightforward robbery, murder, assault or kidnapping and totally against the law of all countries in the world. Indeed, according to the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea: 'Incidents of piracy and armed robbery in the territorial sea or in a port area are perceived as crimes against the state and thus subject to its national laws.'

The International Maritime Bureau, a non-profit-making organisation established in 1981 to act as a focal point in the fight against all types of maritime crime and malpractice, reports that piracy and armed robbery attacks against ships rose 14% in the first nine months of this year, compared to the same period of 2006, marking the second consecutive quarterly increase in attacks.

In the first nine months of 2007, 198 attacks were reported versus 174 in 2006. A total of 15 vessels were hijacked, 172 crewmembers were taken hostage, 63 were kidnapped, and 21 were assaulted. Quite rightly, piracy and other similar security issues that can have dire effects are key concerns within the offshore industry.

Piracy is one form of security issue; another is political unrest, ▶

which can be caused by internal friction or war. The oil and gas industry has coped over many years with wars, such as in Angola, and unrest, as in Nigeria. Now, increasingly, because of terrorist attacks around the world, personal security is becoming a major issue for the men and women working in the offshore industry, especially as we find ourselves working in frontier regions.

Scope for discussion

From a company point of view, any form of 'security event' can have implications on schedules and cost. An interesting topic for discussion is how companies on both sides of a contract should be dealing with this.

Should there be 'security event' headings in a contract in the event of 'something' happening? Should there perhaps be an understanding by both parties, client and contractor, about how they would deal with the issues that arise from a security event? Should the onus be on the client or the contractor, or should it be shared, and, if so, how?

Taking the internationally accepted threat condition colour code, should there be pre-agreed actions taken when the elevated (yellow), high (orange), or severe (red) levels are in place? After all, the higher the threat condition the greater the risk of an incident and with it come a whole range of knock-on effects to individual people, to schedules, and to cost.

Feedback from everyone involved in the industry would be welcomed on these key questions. There is surely scope for a cross-industry position to be adopted.

Robust procedures are vital

What is not a topic for discussion, but a given, is that all companies should have robust procedures in place, including heightened awareness – especially when their personnel are in transit, and/or travelling on their own. And, particularly perhaps for those quick in and out trips, typical for marine contractors, when there is no time to build up personal knowledge of the location or probably an onshore local presence to provide support or local knowledge.

Your government's advice should be taken on board. A British citizen's natural port of call for this advice would be the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website www.fco.gov.uk, which has official FCO travel advice notices for over 200 countries based on the most accurate and up-to-date information available. These are designed to help British travellers make informed decisions about travelling abroad.

The FCO site also highlights its 'Know before you go' campaign and its 'Security information service for business overseas' (SISBO) which provide information for businesses on issues of security and political risk when operating in particular markets overseas. There is also a brief summary of the worldwide terrorist threat in the 'Risk of terrorism' section.

Vessel and asset protection

Protection plans for vessels and assets depend upon the location, level of threat, company procedures and collaborative efforts with national agencies, clients and other contractors during a project.

Experience the progress.

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IMCA has facilitated discussion on this subject through its security task force. For example, non-marine personnel attending projects may not be familiar with the ISPS (international ship and port security) code and so IMCA publishes a special guidance document for them. Merchant vessels are unarmed. Protection by armed support is not always available or appropriate, so deterrence through attentive personnel and robust procedures is the best defence.

Take personal responsibility

Of course, the safety and awareness buck stops with each and every one of us as individuals. We all need to be vigilant when travelling – at the airport, in the street, at the hotel, in the port; and also when working at a port or harbour, offshore, or when involved with construction onshore.

“The safety and awareness buck stops with each and every one of us as individuals.”

A useful publication from the IMCA security task force, *Guidance on Travel Security*, looks at travel planning, assessing travel risk, identification and passport, credit cards and currency, emergency information, emergency situations, hotels, legal issues, precautions when travelling and general medical guidance.

It covers general precautions, hotel safety, street safety, transport safety (flights, car hire and driving cars), emergency response communications, and kidnap situations – both ‘express kidnap’ and kidnap and ransom.

In all there are some 150 or so tips for safe travel in the publication and its associated pocket safety card. These are the top ten:

- stay alert.
- look after your passport – it is your most valuable possession when travelling internationally. Keep it and any air tickets in a safe place and keep a photocopy and spare photographs with you.
- avoid drawing attention to yourself.
- travel light.
- arrive and depart in the morning where possible.
- take a simple rubber door wedge with you.
- use simple ‘burglar alarms’ like a metal tray against a door.
- unpredictability is a good defence against kidnap.
- keep a list of key contacts easily accessible.
- remember – possessions are replaceable, you are not.

IMCA security task force action

IMCA established a security task force in 2005 to address security matters, covering training, competence, marine and shore operations. It has a broad remit to address the variety of issues surrounding the subject; and since its formation two years ago has been hard at work developing industry guidance and best practices, establishing a network for sharing of security-related information, identifying relevant training and developing a number of initiatives for the benefit of the industry.

Guides produced include *Guidance on Travel Security*, *Verification of*

Nigeria – a case study

Petroleum has played a significant role in the Nigerian economy for nearly half a century and currently accounts for approximately 40% of the country’s GDP. It is the 12th largest producer of petroleum in the world and the 8th largest exporter, and has the 10th largest proven reserves. Yet since the 1970s, when Nigeria joined OPEC as a founding member and began to exploit the massive natural reserves generated by production in the oil-rich Niger Delta, it has had a troubled history of political upheaval and local corruption attached to the E&P industry.

Due to a crumbling infrastructure, corruption, and ongoing civil strife in the Niger Delta, its main oil producing region, oil production and export is not at 100% capacity. Militant attacks have cut Nigeria’s oil production by 25%. More than 200 hostages have been taken by armed groups in the last 18 months in Nigeria but, so far, nobody has ever been killed.

Awash with oil, Port Harcourt, the capital city of Rivers State, should be a boom town – but instead it has become one of the most dangerous cities in West Africa. Set in lush swamps with palm trees on every street corner, the southern Nigerian port town was once known as the Garden City.

But security has sharply deteriorated in recent years amid escalating militant attacks on oil installations, kidnappings and general lawlessness. The snatching of the three-year-old daughter of an expatriate worker in 2007 was just the latest in a long line of abductions by gunmen in the region.

Much of the violence in Nigeria’s oil refining capital has been blamed on turf wars between political gangs that sprouted during the 2003 general elections and later turned to full-time criminal activity.

Source: BBC News

Third-Party Security Personnel, Introduction to the ISPS Code, Threat Risk Assessment Procedure and a handy personal security pocket card. More guides are in the pipeline.

This group has been working at the level where they can affect the behaviour of teams and individuals amongst member companies. Now there is a move to establish an additional group at managing director level to help ensure that procedures are woven into overall company policy; and that security issues are discussed at the highest possible level within all member and client companies. There are other similar groups working at various of levels throughout the industry. Please, with safety and your security in mind, take note of all they have to offer. ●

Author Profile

Hugh Williams

Hugh Williams became IMCA Chief Executive in April 2002. He is a chartered civil engineer and started his career in dock and harbour design and site supervision, including training as a commercial diver, before moving to offshore consultants Noble Denton. Here he specialised in marine operations, including towage and installation of offshore platforms, and especially heavy lift crane operations.

This project and engineering experience was a vital springboard to his next role, as the business development manager for Heerema Marine Contractors’ UK office. Before starting at IMCA he had another spell in marine consultancy with Global Maritime.

As the chief executive, Hugh works closely with IMCA Council, comprising senior representatives of International Contractor (ICO) members. He leads on commercial/contracting-related issues and ensures compliance with the association’s competition law policy, which is crucial to advancing IMCA’s work and members’ collective interests within the confines of the extensive regulations applied to trade association activities.