On January 17, 2018 the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board (C-NLOPB) flexed its regulatory muscles and suspended operations at Husky Energy Inc’s SeaRose Floating, Production, Storage and Offloading vessel at its White Rose oil field 350 kilometres east of St. John’s.

The drastic action was in response to an incident on March 29, 2017 when an iceberg entered the SeaRose’s 0.25 nautical mile Ice Exclusion Area. According to Husky’s Ice Management Plan, the SeaRose should have disconnected and sailed away from the iceberg. Instead, the press release says “personnel were at one point instructed to muster and ‘brace for impact.’” At the time, the SeaRose had 84 personnel and approximately 360,000 barrels of crude on board. The iceberg didn’t hit the FPSO or its subsea infrastructure and there were no injuries or damage sustained.

A formal inquiry started on May 9, 2017 but the C-NLOPB didn’t act until it reviewed the report’s preliminary findings. Those findings were troublesome enough that the Board ordered that operations cease on the SeaRose until it was confident corrective actions had taken place. Nine days later, the suspension was lifted.

The Calgary-based company says during that time it conducted a comprehensive review of its ice management and emergency response plan and that improvements have been made. It completed an emergency response drill observed by the C-NLOPB, industry partners and the offshore facilities certifying authority. Management met with employees onshore and offshore to communicate the changes being made and to reinforce procedures must be followed with no exceptions. The company also installed Trevor Pritchard as its new senior vice-president for the Atlantic region. Pritchard had been the company’s head of safety.

Production resumed on the SeaRose on Jan. 29. But it also cost Malcolm MacLean—Husky’s senior vice-president for the Atlantic region since 2012—his job. He was quickly replaced by Pritchard and is no longer with the company.

Why wasn’t the ice management plan followed on March 29, 2017? Husky hasn’t given a clear answer to this question. What it is clear about, is if it’s faced with a similar situation in the future, history will not be repeated. “We should have disconnected. We have a plan. It wasn’t followed. We’ve taken steps to make sure that cannot happen again,” Husky spokesperson Colleen McConnell wrote in an emailed response. “This includes making clear with our offshore installation managers and all staff in the region that should a similar incident occur, we expect the plan to be followed, and the SeaRose to disconnect. No exceptions.”

Tip of the iceberg
After a close call involving the SeaRose, Husky Energy works to regain a regulator’s trust

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