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IECEX protects people working in extreme conditions

During a recent business visit to Norway, Chris Agius was invited by [Statoil](#), the Norwegian energy company, to attend the commissioning of an offshore oil rig.

As Executive Secretary of [IECEX](#), the IEC System for Certification to Standards Relating to Equipment for Use in Explosive Atmospheres, Agius was in his element.

Today's offshore oil rigs may be compared to floating cities, with hundreds of workers – engineers, geologists, divers and so forth – living in quarters equipped with movie theatres, satellite television, gyms, saunas and more. As high-tech and comfortable as modern oil rigs can be, these advantages seem just compensation for the conditions and risks these individuals face working their shifts at sea.

Explosions. Exposure to extreme temperatures, chemicals and gases. High falls. Burns. Fingers, arms and legs caught in spinning machinery. These are among the dangers that threaten oil rig workers. Living and working on an oil rig means a constant encounter with potentially deadly conditions. The core activity on a platform is basically drawing extremely flammable fluids out of the earth, burning off some of it in a giant jet of flame and separating highly poisonous hydrogen sulphide gas from the extracted petroleum. In addition, oil rig workers have to deal with all the dangers associated with operating dangerous machinery at substantial heights and in extreme weather.

Of course, workers are protected by specific clothing and accessories: hard hats, safety glasses and boots, protective suits. They are also highly trained. All petroleum companies operating offshore production platforms put a strong emphasis on safety and training.

While offshore platforms may represent an extreme situation, a concentration of the risks and dangers existing in hazardous areas, these same kinds of risks and dangers are also present in chemical processing plants, petrol stations, sugar refineries, underground coal mines, grain handling and storage silos and hospital operating theatres, to name but a few.

The Ex industries have the obligation to provide the required levels of safety in equipment and personnel. This is where IECEX plays a major role in testing and certifying that equipment, systems and competency of personnel meet the highest international standards of safety.

IECEX Industry Workshop

In parallel with the oil rig visit, Agius attended the IECEX Industry Symposium, which was held on 16-17 September 2009 in Bergen, Norway and organized by [NEK](#), the Norwegian IECEX Member Body. Agius gave a presentation on the IECEX System and its various Schemes (Certified Equipment, Certified Services and Certified



Chris Agius (centre) donning protective clothing...



...to attend the commissioning of an offshore oil rig



Participants in the IECEX Industry

Personnel Competencies).

Symposium in Bergen, Norway

The two-day event offered a complete overview of the issues faced by the Ex industries. It gave Agius the opportunity to introduce the newly-launched IECEX Certification of Personnel Competencies Scheme, which will provide companies with independent proof that a person holding an IECEX CoPC (Certificate of Personnel Competency) has the qualifications, experience and skills necessary to work in hazardous areas. The personnel competencies of offshore platform workers was one of the topics covered at the symposium.

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