

Shell death toll 'higher than peers'

News services

Anglo-Dutch supermajor Shell last year suffered more workforce deaths than any other major western oil company, with a rate of fatalities twice as high as its UK peer BP, it has emerged.

The figures, compiled by the Financial Times from company reports, follow renewed focus on Shell's safety record after it was prosecuted over the death in 2005 of a contractor at the Clipper wellhead platform, in the UK North Sea.

Two employees and 28 contractors were killed working for Shell in 2007, compared with three employees and four contractors for BP, and eight contractors for for US supermajor ExxonMobil, the FT said.

Of the three, Shell has a larger workforce, with 104,000 employees at the end of last year, compared with 98,000 for BP and 81,000 for ExxonMobil.

The Financial Times said differences in organisational structure and operations account for some of the variation in reported deaths between companies.

Shell's overall safety performance, as measured by reported injuries per million work hours, was slightly better than BP's, but it has for years suffered a higher fatality rate than its peers.

One reason is that Shell operates in a number of high-risk countries, including Nigeria. Nine of last year's deaths were in Nigeria, with two people killed in attacks on Shell facilities, and 10 in Russia.

The number of fatalities was significantly lower than the 43 recorded in 2006, and Shell's death rate has fallen sharply in the past decade - it lost 67 people in 1997.

Shell told the FT: "We are deeply saddened by these losses. Of these fatalities, 17 happened in our upstream business, mainly on the roads, or at high-risk locations like Nigeria, where two lives were lost due to assaults and a third died as a result of a fire caused by criminals stealing oil from a pipeline."

Last week Shell and service player Amec were each fined £150,000 (\$230,000) after an Amec worker died during operations at Clipper.

An inspector with the UK's Health & Safety Executive said in a report accident had been caused by the two companies "failing to manage well-known and readily foreseeable hazards", and said that, had adequate risk assessments been carried out, the "accident could have been avoided".