Powering safe wind turbine maintenance at sea

A workplace high in the sky

Slapping a lick of paint on an offshore wind turbine is possibly one of the most white-knuckle jobs someone could do. Maintenance crews work suspended on ropes at heights sometimes topping 100 metres, with nothing below but the freezing, heaving North Sea.

Under these conditions, safety is everything. Which is why Offshore Painting Services (OPS), one of the leading maintenance firms in the UK offshore wind industry, takes no chances.
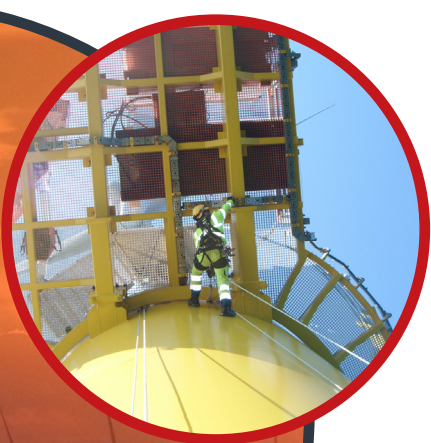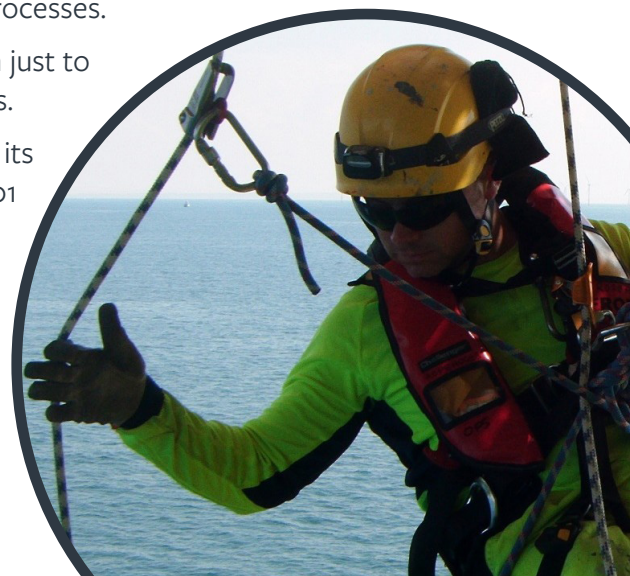
"OPS holds health and safety as a top priority," says Blade and Rope Access Manager Lee Bolton. "We have a zero-harm policy, which is passed onto our employees and technicians alike."

As part of its zero-harm culture, the company has a rigorous training and preparation programme that spans everything from Global Wind Organisation Working at Heights courses to Oil & Gas UK Offshore Medical examinations.

When it comes to personal protective equipment (PPE), the company puts special emphasis on the condition of ropes and associated working-at-height materials, rigorously applying before-and-after-use check sheets and other processes.

But by 2016 it was not enough just to check things on a regular basis.

With OPS looking to maintain its ISO 9001 quality and ISO 14001 environmental certifications, and gain an additional OHSAS 18001 Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series accreditation, the firm had to prove the checks were being carried out.

Providing proof of inspection

At the time, OPS logged equipment inspections on paper. This took time and was potentially subject to human error. It also led to delays between inspections and records being updated, and made it hard to track down paperwork relating to a given item.

OPS's management was conscious that a slip-up in record-keeping could potentially lead to an accident.

And that might not only infringe the firm's zero-harm commitment but also damage its reputation as a reliable service provider in the highly safety-conscious wind industry.

To cut the risk, the company adopted Papertrail, a fully integrated digital inspection, certification and audit management platform originally designed for rope access PPE inspections and now used by some of the biggest names in the offshore wind business.

Papertrail is built to work on all iOS and Android mobile devices, making it quick and easy to update inspection reports from the field while maximising OPS's investment in mobile technology.

It is also compatible with any brand or component that has a serial number, barcode or RFID tag. Reports can be accessed, via the cloud, from anywhere in the world by anyone who needs to see them.

Promoting safe working practices

OPS originally introduced Papertrail to replace paper-based PPE inspection management, allowing the company to keep better track of regular inspections of strops, harnesses, ascenders and other items typically associated with rope access work.

Within months, says Bolton: "We noticed an improvement in efficiency, time saving and ease of access."

This isn't just a relief for OPS. The large energy firms OPS works for are also extremely conscious of the need for safety. After all, if someone has an accident out at sea then it's the wind farm owner, not the contractor, whose name appears in the headlines.

For this reason, OPS is often required to demonstrate that is has appropriate equipment management systems in place to maintain safe working practices at all times.

Having Papertrail helps OPS tick all the right boxes, and gives its customers the confidence to award and renew contracts. It's not the only reason customers choose OPS, but it certainly contributes.

ZERO HARM

"**We have a zero-harm policy, which is passed onto our employees and technicians alike.**"

LEE BOLTON,
BLADE AND ROPE ACCESS MANAGER

"A revolutionary system with regards PPE"

In fact, Papertrail has played a role in helping OPS maintain an enviable health and safety record.

Despite logging hundreds of thousands of on-site man-hours on some of the world's biggest offshore wind projects, including Greater Gabbard, Gwynt y Mor and Walney, OPS has yet to suffer a lost-time incident.

At any time, OPS can prove it is fully compliant with the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998, the Lifting Operations Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 and the Working at Height Regulations 2005, among other legal requirements.

This is critical for OPS's wind farm operations customers, which still rely heavily on rope-access-based inspections and maintenance despite the advent of technologies such as drones and sensors.

OPS, meanwhile, enjoys greater administration efficiency and flexibility since Papertrail allows the company to set notifications to suit any given asset and the platform is easy to integrate with a growing range of other renewable energy asset management tools.

"Papertrail has been a revolutionary system for OPS with regards to control over our PPE," Bolton says.

Start reducing your risk today

If you're still relying on a paper-based system to track inspections then you may not be paying much... but it could cost you millions in fines, reputational damage and post-incident investigations if there is a problem. Is that a risk you want to carry on taking?

Find out how you can run a smarter, safer rope-access service today with Papertrail.
Call us now on +44 1248 719270 or write to us at mail@papertrail.io.

About OPS
Offshore Painting Services specialises in the high-quality weather protection and the composite blade repairs of wind turbine farms and other structures situated in one of the most hostile environments on the planet.

About Papertrail
Papertrail was created out of the need to find an easier way to keep accurate records and demonstrate compliance for equipment inspections and audits.

Today, industry-leading partners, SMEs to larger enterprise and public sector organisations and their staff and contractors trust Papertrail to drive business efficiencies and optimise compliance by managing equipment inspections, certification and safety records. Find out more at papertrail.io.

Find out more at
www.papertrail.io

5 Station Road, Llanfairfechan, Conwy
LL33 0AL, United Kingdom
Phone: +44 (0)1248 719270
Email: mail@papertrail.io

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Record keeping made simple