



Offshore Containers

Calling time on offshore containers made to BS7072

by Denis Hogan, Regional Manager – West, LEEA (Lifting Equipment Engineers Association)

For users and suppliers of offshore containers – as well as those with responsibility for their inspection and repair – 2015 is a significant year. Unless there are convincing reasons to do otherwise, LEEA believes that it marks the point at which any container made to the now obsolete standard BS7072 should finally be withdrawn from service.

Commonly used in the global oil and gas industries, offshore containers are designed as a means of safely and securely moving a wide range of items to and from offshore sites. Manufactured in an equally diverse array of sizes and styles, they are routinely fitted with permanently attached slings, hence the interest of LEEA and many of its member companies. The reason why 2015 is of particular note for this type of equipment is a little convoluted. However, a brief overview of the evolution of relevant standards and guidance over the past few decades provides the answer, and should prove useful to anyone with an interest in the safe use of offshore containers.

BS7072 - The Code of Practice for Inspection and Repair of Offshore Containers, was introduced in 1989. Design requirements, albeit rather limited in scope and detail, were contained in an annex to the main document. Ten years later, whilst a replacement for BS7072 was being prepared, the IMO (International Marine Organisation) published MSC/Circ.860, Guidelines for the approval of offshore containers handled in open seas. This specified that offshore containers should be pre-slung and such slings should be permanently attached to the container. In 1999, the harmonised European standard BS EN 12079 – Offshore containers, design, construction, testing, inspection and marking, was published. This was specifically designed to replace BS7072, which was subsequently withdrawn.

In Feb 2005, with a view to strengthening BS EN 12079, the Marine Coastguard Agency issued Marine Guidance Notice MGN 282(M) – Guidance in the carriage of packaged dangerous goods in offshore supply vessels. This introduced an important new requirement, which stated that containers that do not fully comply with the aforementioned MSC/Circ.860 but built to BS7072 may continue to be used for the transport of dangerous goods until Jan 1nd 2015, subject to them being surveyed and maintained in accordance with a recognised standard. A year later came the updated BS EN 12079: 2006 - Offshore containers and associated lifting sets. Finally, since 2008, work on an international standard, ISO 10855, has been underway. When it finally sees the light of day, this will in turn replace BS EN 12079.

Clearly there has been no shortage of activity in terms of standards and guidance for offshore containers in the past thirty years or so. However, in the field, many containers built to the original requirements of BS7072 remain in service, even though the deadline set by MSC/Circ.860 for their use for carrying dangerous goods has passed. That raises another obvious question: what about using containers made to BS7072 for goods that don't fall into this category?

Clearly it is perfectly possible to argue the case for carrying on as before, and not just by reference to the precise wording of MSC/Circ.860. After all, if a container made to BS7072 has proved a safe and durable means of transporting goods, and inspection shows that this remains the case, what is the point of taking it out of service?

Whilst recognizing the basis for such arguments, in LEEA's opinion there are broader issues to consider. Ultimately, is there any justification for supplying or using containers built to a standard that was withdrawn and replaced over 15 years ago? After all, there can be little doubt that subsequent standards and guidance have offered a significant step forward: the crude and often meaningless 'proof load test everything' approach of BS7072 has evolved into the modern and much more effective principle of designing to meet essential health and safety requirements. And whilst there are certainly applications within the lifting industry where both suppliers and end users have little option but to refer to obsolete standards, clearly this is not the case with offshore containers. Given that a contemporary and comprehensive framework for the design, manufacture and inspection of offshore containers has been in place for an extended period of time, LEEA can see no reason why its application should be anything less than universal. It's time for the offshore industry to finally confine

BS7072 to the history books.

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