SAFETY AT SEA

At first glance, the office on Beurtschipperstraat in the port of Rotterdam looks like the newsroom of a press agency. However, the constant stream of messages received here relate to customers’ vessels sailing on all seven seas in this world. A visit to Dräger Marine Offshore Service.

TEXT OLIVER DRIESEN | PHOTOS PATRICK OHLIGSCHLÄGER

Ruud Maasland is well prepared as he walks along the gangway to board JB-115. The 61-year-old employee of Dräger Marine Offshore Service in the port of Rotterdam knows what’s coming next. Waiting for him on the deck is Mark O’Shane, offshore installation manager at Jack-Up Barge, an operator of self-elevating platforms.

Steel platforms like JB-115 use a propeller to move through the water like a ship or they are towed – to the construction site of a wind farm off the coast, for example. Once they have arrived at their destination, they plant themselves on the seabed using four huge pillars. Their rotating crane is thus stabilized and they can then maneuver components such as wind turbine shafts and rotors into position. In a short while, JB-115 will leave Rotterdam on course for Deutsche Bucht. The next construction site is already waiting. But before then, the Scot Mark O’Shane has to clear the decks as the man responsible for safety and procedures on board.

PROVEN RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Dutchman Maasland has to rely somewhat on O’Shane’s goodwill because he has a colleague and two visitors in tow to show them the platform’s safety equipment, which is supplied and maintained by Dräger. “You always drag along these people,” says the good-natured Scotsman, teasing him, “and I never even get a bar of chocolate out of it. But that’s OK!” O’Shane rolls his eyes in playful resignation. After a short safety briefing for the visitors, who are wearing protective clothing, he lets them on board. “You are welcome to take a look around!”

Few people know Dräger Marine Offshore Service’s recipe for success better than Maasland, who has been working in the so-called FRS business with maritime customers for more than three decades. FRS stands for firefighting, rescue, and safety. Dräger has a comprehensive global product portfolio in these three areas, allowing it to supply everything a decent-sized ship needs –
IMPOSING STRUCTURE:
The self-elevating platform JB-115 is still in the port of Rotterdam. Soon it will be moved to Deutsche Bucht, where a new offshore wind farm is being built.
LINED UP: These fire escape hoods, part of the safety equipment on ships and drilling platforms, wait for their regular inspection.

HOMEMADE: Experts from Dräger Marine Offshore Service maintain and repair the customers’ equipment in the company’s own workshop.

URBAN MEETS MARITIME: Rotterdam, the second-biggest city in the Netherlands, is Europe’s most important oil and gas port.
from the simple fire extinguisher to the
high-tech foam cannon, as required by
law on floating helicopter landing pads.
From first aid kits and emergency ven-
tilators to gas detectors for drilling plat-
forms and survival suits for sea res-
cue missions, Dräger not only sells all
of these products, but can also service
them if required. Many aspects are tak-
en care of on board, including regular
maintenance, function testing, test cer-
tification, spare parts provision, repairs,
and training. On deck is the place where
the customers are – and also where the
potential lies for sales employees like
Maasland to network with people.
“... won’t secure any contract,” says
Maasland. “... make promises, but also keep them.” After all, it
is not just the price that counts or the high
quality of the available products, or even
the often extremely long maintenance
periods of up to ten years on account of
this high quality. Above all else, it is the
chemistry that someone like Maasland
establishes. It subtly says: “... because we tick in the same way as
you! We won’t leave you in the lurch when
you change your course or schedule on
the high seas.” All of these are unspoken
messages that are received – or not, as the
case may be.
A number of different pieces of
equipment on board platform JB-115
shows that Dräger has struck the right
tone with Jack-Up Barge. “... platform benefits from our entire
FRS equipment portfolio – both in terms
of products and services,” says Roland
Schwegman. The 32-year-old is responsi-
ble for business development at Dräger in
Rotterdam. He points out the foam extin-
guishing system on the helicopter deck as
one example: Their “monitors” – mobile
foam cannons that are used in the event
of a crash landing – are regularly ser-
viced by experts based at the Rotterdam
headquarters.

THE CUSTOMERS ALWAYS NEED TO BE ON THE
HIGH SEAS, WHERE THEY EARN THEIR MONEY

TODAY NIGERIA,
TOMORROW RUSSIA
The service also includes fire extinguish-
ers, respiratory masks, survival suits, and
CO₂ pressure cylinders for smothering
fires in the engine room. Many of these
refills, regular inspections, and repairs
can neither be carried out in the safety
of the port or in Dräger’s big workshop on
Beurtschipperstraat. Foam cannons, for
example, cannot be used at all in ports
for environmental reasons. Accordingly,
their functional safety can only be test-
ed at sea. Customers need to be at sea
anyway, because this is where they earn
their money with their vessels, rather
than wasting time and frittering away
money on fees in the port. Very few busi-
nesses are structured to be as mobile as
Dräger Marine Offshore Service, whose
customers operate thousands of vessels
around the globe. And very few have to
deal with so many imponderables, from
logistics to politics.

“... returned from Nigeria last week,” says Dick de
Fries, 56, head of almost 80 Rotterdam-
based Dräger employees. “... our people in the Jeep had
to be escorted by armed vehicles due to
the tension surrounding the presiden-
tial election. The destination this week
is Russia. Oh yes, and then we have just
taken on a new gas tanker project for
Mozambique; an international joint ven-
ture.” It is therefore no coincidence that
the planning department in the offices of
Dräger Marine Offshore Service is rem-
iniscent of a newsroom. On countless
screens, linked to one control desk after another, orders and price enquiries are received, alongside the latest updates from all over the world, including offshore construction sites that have reported problems, gas tankers that have been hampered by storms, and ships whose plans have been changed by customers. Yet the show must go on – even in the face of adversity – and the business must also continue to provide its services on the seven seas of this world. It is a business that is special in many ways. For one thing, Dräger Marine Offshore Service also has third-party products in its portfolio, because shipowners mostly prefer this or that brand. For another, it is almost impossible to separate sales from service.

“It is different here to other Dräger business divisions,” stresses de Vries. “There are usually experts in one specific field or another. That isn’t the case here!” In the maritime business, people like to entrust the servicing to the same party that sold the equipment. Every Monday at 11 a.m. at the weekly planning meeting, de Vries and Schwegmann therefore get together with their most experienced colleagues to adapt their strategy to whatever is happening in the world. They call it a flow meeting, although it usually involves addressing things that have come to a standstill. The nine people gathered in the room survey the latest situation on a large screen on the front wall. Every supplied vessel between Cape Horn and the Bering Strait appears on a list, complete with name, service status, details of any delays, and all other noteworthy information.

**BREXIT UNCERTAINTY**

The meeting is rather laid-back on this particular day, until one item arises on the agenda that has increasingly been causing consternation among planners for a number of weeks on both sides of the English Channel: Brexit. “We move a lot of goods and people between Rotterdam and our key location in Aberdeen,” explains Schwegman. “That is why we want to permanently station our two maintenance containers there, with everything required to provide on-board service.”

Yet before the planned Brexit date, nobody knows the legal implications of this from a customs and trade perspective in the future. “The biggest concern is that speed and flexibility may suffer.” And those are the trump cards in the global game played by Dräger Marine Offshore Service. These things were still a long way off when the forerunner to Dräger was founded on the site in the port of Rotterdam in the 1970s. “Back then, the owner initially concentrated on inland ships that traveled along the Rhine,” says de Vries, who was still chartering towards the end of this era. Oil, gas, and chemical freighters continue to make up part of Dräger’s customer base to this day. “Over time, the authorities prescribed ever more safety equipment for these vessels and we eventually became the biggest supplier after Dräger itself. Dräger then acquired the company in two stages and had completed the takeover by the year 2000. At the same time, the business grew with oceangoing ships, where the focus has now been for some considerable time.

Most of the work has now been digitalized and is performed across different time zones. On Beurtschipperstraat, radar contacts on computer screens show all relevant ship movements in real time – whether in the port of Rotterdam or somewhere in the North Atlantic. New markets such as cruise ships are being targeted. The image of the family-run business leisurely floating along is long gone. Yet some things never change. “Personal eye contact remains crucial.” The sales veteran Ruud Maasland knows this in his sleep.
AN EYE FOR DETAIL: The Dräger X-plore 6300 full face mask on the deck of a customer’s ship. Onboard visits are an essential part of the service business.

ROOTS: The business run by Dräger Marine Offshore Service started with inland ships in the port of Rotterdam – and continues to this day.

DIALOGUE: A long-standing relationship founded on trust often develops on the basis of conversations between crew members and Dräger employees.