



## OFFSHORE OPPORTUNITIES

An initial interest by a plumbing firm in offshore work has led to it starting up a new company specifically formulated for the demands of the oil and gas industry off the coast of New Plymouth. Business owner Jeremy Cottam explains its evolution to *Plumbers' Journal*.

Three years ago, the New Plymouth-based firm of Flush Plumbing Limited, a Master Plumbers member, decided to put its staff through the Huet programme of training for offshore activity as it was doing a lot of work on floating platforms and boats that were being brought into the New Plymouth area.

A few trips offshore, however, and it became apparent that – if the company was to service the offshore industry – the staff would need even more specific training. In addition, it raised the question about whether the existing business format should cater for the offshore market.

“It was difficult to market the company as only catering for the needs of the offshore market, so it was decided to form another company specifically targeting this industry,” Jeremy says, adding that as those needs became very specific, the training became very specialised and the safety needs of the staff on the projects became paramount. So, Offshore Plumbing Services Limited was formed in August 2009 and now has a staff of five. Flush Plumbing has continued, but has also had a change in that it became part of the Laser Plumbing group of franchises.

“It’s all part of making the most of business opportunities and we saw joining the Laser Group as part of that.”

So far, Offshore Plumbing has invested over \$20,000 in training, which has included putting all staff through Bosiet, Permit to

Work, Gas Testing, and Swagelock courses; and, of course, obtaining Site Safe passports. The company has also established contracts with the offshore oil and gas firms and is their Nominated Contractor.

“We have invested a lot in the training of the people going out there – we only have a small team so we needed to be sure all the staff had the relevant qualifications,” Jeremy says, adding that, already, the work has been varied and continues to be.

“PLUMBING HAD TO BE HOOKED UP AND BROUGHT UP TO NZ STANDARD”

The Offshore Plumbing team has been involved recently in the set-up of the accommodation modules on Maui Platform B. Modules were imported from China and plumbing had to be hooked up and brought up to NZ standard, Jeremy explains. “These units had problems with hot water cylinders not having relief valves on them, waste pipes were blocked with metal filings, hot water cylinders had to be turned around so that elements could be got at as the elements were all facing the wall, and waste pipes/water pipes had to be run to connect them all in Schedule 80 pipe and fittings.”

The biggest challenge, that other plumbers/gasfitters would not generally have to face, is the weather conditions where helicopters are unable to fly – or land – in foggy conditions. This means work can be scheduled for a particular day and weather

“ THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE... IS THE WEATHER CONDITIONS ”



The Offshore Plumbing team (left to right) Denay Cottam beside his father Jeremy Cottam, Steven Rolfe, Darren Mason and Craig Metcalfe.

can disrupt flights or lead to the all-critical ‘persons on board’ (POB) – the total number of people allowed to be working on the rig for safety reasons – level being exceeded.

Both of the main contractors the company works for have regular updates of the POB issues. Sometimes it can mean that staff are bumped from their flights to allow for oil or gas company production staff.

“Having a company that caters for onshore work is also handy as our staff are usually able to be reallocated,” Jeremy says. Other challenges include the need for correct fittings and materials to be sent out to the platforms: “One of the company’s suppliers sent out some K2 fittings with only half the fitting intact. It is imperative that the fittings that are requested and needed onboard the platforms are the correct ones and suitable for the conditions on the platforms. Often having to wait for a boat can cost the plumbers time and many times additional

hours have to be worked depending on the arrival of gear coming by boat.”

Jeremy’s clients are demanding “in a good way”, he says. “They expect service and they expect knowledge and they get it. We have to be prepared to go if that is what is expected of us. Safety is paramount to all our clients and the safety of our staff is absolutely at the top of the list for us.”

Offshore Plumbing Services has spent many hours on upskilling with regard to health and safety procedures and has also invested in a lot of new gear including fire retardant overalls, regulation boots and eyewear.

“We don’t see the work easing up and we are currently marketing towards other offshore interests. Our staff enjoy the work as it is varied and challenging and requires in-depth thought.” ■

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