

TRAINERS CORNER

Unique fire prevention training facility underscores hands-on firefighting exercises, teamwork-building

By Linda Hsieh, associate editor

FOR ANYONE WHO has ever been in a fire or blowout on a drilling rig, the value of the training offered at Parker Fire Prevention & Control School should be clear, said Casey Davis, director of global quality assurance & HSE for Parker Drilling Co.

The school opened in early 2006 on a 19-acre campus in Richmond, just outside of Houston, Texas, with a training program specifically designed to teach fire prevention and extinguishment aboard drilling rigs.

“Our primary goals were to blend traditional classroom curriculum with live fire training, to conduct training scenarios under safe and controlled conditions, and to provide rig crews with the skills they need to properly manage and control rig emergencies of all types,” Mr Davis said.

With a total of 14 instructors working in rotation — all Gulf Coast-area professional firefighters — each class is capped to a maximum of 21 students, providing a student-to-instructor ratio of no more than 7-to-1.

The 24-hour course takes place over 3 days. There’s a mix of classroom instruction and field exercises the first 2 days, and on the third day, students take a written exam and a practical exam, which involves firefighting on a full-scale rig.

One day of classroom training focuses on the role of leadership in emergencies and managing a rig-based fire using available tools, equipment and manpower. The 2nd day focuses on teamwork, understanding how fires are prevented, how they start and extinguishment methods.

“But the most important concept we teach is the decision-making process of whether they can fight the fire or if they need to evacuate,” Mr Casey said. “There’s often a gray area where crews are unsure if they are capable of putting out a fire on the rig. Our school teaches



ABOVE: The final phase of the training course challenges students to work as a team to extinguish a live rig fire under instructor supervision. **BELOW:** The school is equipped with a full-scale burnable rig, props and specialized instruction.



them that, and it’s both a life-saving decision and an important cost decision for the company.”

Field exercises make up about 75% of total course time and include rig fires, mud system fires, flange fires, spills,

night fires, heat stress, search and rescue, firefighting strategies and tactics, and use of personal protective gear.

According to Mr Casey, the school has rapidly taken off during its first full year of operation. It trained 262 employees in 2006, far exceeding original expectations of 50-60 students a year. In tandem with the school, Parker Drilling has installed upgraded firefighting equipment on 70% of its fleet and plans to equip the remaining rigs in 2007.

Looking to the future, Mr Casey said the school is ready to expand outside of Parker Drilling employees and encourages other personnel — from operators, drilling contractors and service companies — to participate. In November, representatives from the Iraqi Petroleum Ministry visited the school, and another visit is scheduled for early this year.

“We hope people from across the industry will come to this facility,” he said. “Not only do we have an unique campus — the only full-scale, burnable rig in the world — we also have first-class training props that we’ll continue to add to in 2007 and beyond.”