

Heat Trace Fire (SA-2008-09)

SAFETY ALERT - #09-2008

**HEAT TRACE FIRE
RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 20, 2008**

Function: Drilling
Location: Onshore
Incident Type: Near miss

Incident Date: February 2, 2008
Location Detail: Camp
Country and Region: Canada, NE British Columbia

Description of Incident:

A camp attendant smelled smoke and went outside to investigate the source and found a small fire burning at the back of the camp. The fire was caused by an electrical fault in heat tape which was installed on sewage piping on the outside of the camp building.



Outcomes and Recommendations:

There was no electrical ground fault protection device (also known as ground fault interrupter, or GFI) on the heat tape, so current continued to flow after the initial electrical arcing took place. Because of the resistive properties of heat tape and low current draw, a conventional breaker will not trip, so the heat tape will remain energized. A GFI is required to stop current flow in the case of an electrical fault, although it may not prevent fires in all cases. It is recommended that all heat tapes be inspected for cracks, cuts, etc. in the casing; if any are found, the heat tape should not be used. In addition, all heat tape should be used in conjunction with a GFI, following manufacturer's instructions, and the electrical code.

Additional Information:

The National Electrical Code and Canadian Electrical Code require ground-fault protection for electric heat tracing.

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Disclaimer

This Safety Alert is designed to prevent similar incidents by communicating the information at the earliest possible opportunity. Accordingly, the information may change over time. It may be necessary to obtain updates from the source before relying upon the accuracy of the information contained herein. This material is presented for information purposes only. Managers and supervisors should evaluate this information to determine if it can be applied to their own situations and practices.

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