

FAQs for Industry Safe Weight Limit

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Questions about the policy development

Why is a safe weight limit policy required?

Workers weights have been increasing over the last 60 years. Over a third of offshore workers are now above 100kg.

This presents multiple risks related to safe evacuation via lifeboat or helicopter and rescue from the sea or installation.

Installation duty holders must ensure that all persons can be rescued.

What is the OEUK offshore safe weight limit?

The clothed weight limit for offshore workers is 124kg, including a 0.7kg safety margin. This is to ensure safe evacuation and rescue, particularly by search and rescue helicopter winch.

Why is the margin just 0.7kg, the flight suit and lifejacket weigh more than that.

The risks relate to rescue from offshore installations not from water where usually a rescue strop not a stretcher is used. The strop gives a significant margin more during stretcher rescue.

Data indicates that workers do not put on weight when offshore on average, some lose weight, so 0.7kg of a margin is reasonable.

What is the most acute issue?

The search and rescue helicopters in the UK, Norway, and Netherlands all have the same type of winch. When you consider the weight of the winchman paramedic, and the rescue kit it only leaves a remaining 124.7kg for a patient.

Anyone requiring rescue by search and rescue helicopter over 124.7kg cannot be guaranteed rescue.

Why not get a stronger winch or winch cable.

The Winch has been certified for operating with human external cargo by the European Union Aviation Safety Agency which are followed by the UK Civil Aviation Authority. Changes in specifications and certification can take years.

Even with a stronger winch the winchman will still have to manually get the stretcher into the helicopter which is obviously harder with heavier casualties.



	<p>It is not realistic that this issue can be resolved quickly but OEUK will work with stakeholders on this issue throughout 2026 and beyond.</p>
<p>Why can't we get lighter stretchers?</p>	<p>The stretcher in use is the LSC 406 TIF which is already a lightweight titanium stretcher; but much of its weight comes from 2 additional areas, the vacuum mattress/blanket (for spinal immobilization and hypothermia), and the float system. The vac mat and the blanket are clinical requirements that are overarching and cannot be removed.</p> <p>The float system is in place in response to many years of SAR lessons learned, where stretcher floats have proved pivotal in saving either the life of the winch paramedic or the person in the stretcher, if a stretcher ends up in water, patients and paramedic will not sink and shouldn't drown.</p> <p>Each rescue stretcher must be secured inside the helicopter and therefore it is not just a case of changing a stretcher but also refitting the helicopter.</p>
<p>Can we winch casualties without a winchman, using a tagline – like they might do in Norway</p>	<p>Unfortunately, Norway operates with a different crewing strategy with additional rescue nurses in each helicopter that then allows for successful and safe stretcher cabin entry in those circumstances. Without additional personnel in each helicopter the winchman must be winched with the patient to allow for successful and safe cabin entry for the casualty.</p>
<p>Could the weight of helicopter winchmen continue to increase, squeezing the remaining figure for the casualty.</p>	<p>The winchmen paramedics are already below the average weight of offshore workers, due to the highly physical nature of their job they are in good shape, and physically fit, it is not believed to be an issue.</p> <p>The physically demanding nature of the job is also why we can't just find smaller winchmen</p>
<p>Is this problem specific to offshore oil and gas?</p>	<p>Yes and no. The weight increase is common across all of the UK population and aligns with NHS data.</p>
<p>Does the weight limit apply to all offshore installations?</p>	<p>Yes, it applies to installations with accepted Safety Cases under the Offshore Installations (Offshore Safety Directive) (Safety Case etc.) Regulations 2015</p>
<p>How is "clothed weight" defined?</p>	<p>It means the worker's weight when dressed in compliance with the industry clothing travel policy for the relevant season.</p>
<p>Do other countries have safety weight limits?</p>	<p>Norway has a weight restriction within it's medical and the Netherlands are also planning to limit workers weight offshore.</p>

<p>My installation has a helideck can the helicopter not just land and pick up a casualty.</p>	<p>On many installations the helicopter can land most of the time, it is rare that the conditions would require a winch rescue, however the (Prevention of Fire and Explosion and Emergency Response) Regulations 1995 require that installation duty holders have means of evacuation, escape and rescue for all people.</p> <p>For some installations such as floating installations such as semi-subs or FPSOs the conditions that exclude helideck landings are more common.</p> <p>The large search and rescue helicopter are too heavy for the helideck on some older normally unmanned installations.</p>
<p>Why are marine vessels not included?</p>	<p>The marine industry has different safety regulations than offshore installations. The industry is governed by a mixture of international and national legislation. There are different regulatory expectations and duty of care.</p> <p>Nevertheless, it is likely that the risks to heavier workers will be addressed in the marine sector in due course too.</p>
<p>Is it unfair that this limit applies to oil and gas and not those involved in leisure pursuits such as hillwalking or boating?</p>	<p>It is appropriate that those who are required to be at greater risk through their employment have appropriate reliable means of rescue.</p> <p>SAR crews should not be expected to routinely break safe operating limits to rescue people at work.</p>
<p>How many workers may be impacted?</p>	<p>OEUK estimate as many as 5,000 workers will be impacted to varying degrees with most able to achieve the weight limit through weight loss.</p>
<p>The 5,000 figure has been report is greater than the 4.7% figure previously reported.</p>	<p>Yes, 5,000 is all affected, including those below the weight limit who might get a reduced duration medical certificate.</p> <p>The 4.7% figure is based on 125kg in 2022.</p> <p>The exact data for 2024 is 2405 individuals on Vantage with weight records above 124kg. That is 6% which is in line with 2022 data.</p> <p>There is roughly a similar number between 115 and 124 who will be affected leading to the total 5,000 number of all individuals who might be impacted to a lesser or greater extent.</p> <p>There is a caveat to all of these numbers in that the Vantage data includes an unspecified amount of PPE for their helicopter travel between 3 - 7kg each</p>

	helicopter operator uses different figures, so the figures are conservative. In practice some operators are reporting closer to 2.5% when reviewing their own workforce. that would be about 1000 records total on Vantage.
Does the policy exclude muscular people who are fit and healthy?	No, the issue related to weight regardless of fitness or muscle mass. That is because those individuals could also fall ill or be injured requiring rescue by SAR helicopter winch.
Have the unions been consulted?	We have kept Unions informed of the policy development and have listed to their concerns about workers losing their jobs. This has helped us form the policy including the phased supportive implementation plan.
How can I find out more information?	OEUK has a detailed comms plan and has all relevant documents available on our website: Safe weight limit policy Offshore Energies UK (OEUK) , that has all the information anyone needs plus a communications pack for employers. We'll also be keeping people up to date via social media.
How frequent is the need for winching- is the policy disproportionate.	The frequency of winching will depend on the installation type, with fixed installations requiring it less than NUIs in the SNS for example where S92 often cannot land under any conditions. The government SAR helicopter reports a small number – just 2 in three years. However, the industry SAR helicopters who are often deployed first report 15% or casualty evacuations are by winch. Although offshore helicopter winch evacuation is a major factor in determining the weight limit it is not the only risk that the weight limit mitigates including aspects related to lifeboats, stretcher rescue etc. The legal duties apply to all persons.
Questions about the policy	
When does the policy come into effect?	The policy begins on 1 st November, but restrictions do not begin immediately there are 3 phases: 1. Introduction & Awareness 2. Transition 3. Mandatory Implementation Date
What happens during the Introduction and Awareness Phase ?	The Introduction and Awareness Phase runs from 1 st November 2025 to 31 st January 2026. During this time, you will hear from OEUK about the policy and employers will explain what the policy means

	<p>for you and what support will be available for those affected.</p> <p>There is no action required during this phase beyond taking the time to understand what comes next and what it means for you.</p> <p>However, this is also a great time to begin to lose weight if you are concerned about getting below the 124kg limit</p>
<p>What happens during the Transition Phase?</p>	<p>The Transition phase runs from 1st February 2026 to 31st October 2026</p> <p>During this time people with a weight above 124kg will need to begin to lose weight. This 6-month period should be long enough for most workers to get below the 124kg weight limit.</p> <p>Medical examiners will begin to issue reduced duration certificates for workers over or close to the 124kg limit to ensure that workers are aware of the up-coming restrictions.</p> <p>OEUK will continue to communicate the changes, and you should engage with your employer to find out about the range of options available to support your weight loss.</p> <p>We want you to have the greatest success during this time.</p>
<p>What happens at the Mandatory Implementation date?</p>	<p>The Mandatory Implementation date is 1st November 2026.</p> <p>After this date no workers over 124kg will be allowed to travel offshore.</p> <p>You will not be given a medical certificate by an OEUK medical examiner.</p> <p>Prior to mobilisation you may be asked to check your weight before travelling to the heliport to ensure that your weight has not crept up over the 124kg in the time since your last medical. You should let your employer know if you think you are over the 124kg before mobilising.</p>
<p>Will there be support for workers needing to lose weight?</p>	<p>Yes, employers are encouraged to provide access to weight loss programmes and support services, with NHS and other resources signposted in the guidance.</p>

	<p>Step Change in Safety will be providing material on healthy living and weight loss throughout October, November and December 2025.</p>
<p>What happens if I exceed the weight limit at my OEUK medical?</p>	<p>If you go for an OEUK medical during the Transition phase you will be issued a medical with a reduced duration to 31st October 2026. You will have to attend a medical assessment shortly before then to demonstrate your weight is below 124kg.</p> <p>After the mandatory compliance phase from 1st November 2026, you will not be issued a fitness to work certificate if you are over 124kg.</p>
<p>Will there be different arrangements for those using the OEUK medical abroad?</p>	<p>The OEUK medical is envisaged as a UK only document and hence there is no consideration of the implementation internationally.</p> <p>We recognise the use of the OEUK internationally and understand the implications of including a weight restriction within it. We will keep this aspect under review however we don't currently plan any changes or dispensations at this stage.</p>
<p>Can I still travel offshore if I have a valid medical certificate but weigh over 124kg at the heliport?</p>	<p>Yes, until the Mandatory Compliance date of 1st November 2026.</p> <p>After the mandatory compliance date, you will not be permitted to travel offshore if you weigh over 124kg at check-in, regardless of your certificate</p>
<p>What happens if I've measured myself at home on the bathroom scales and I was just below 124kg but I am slightly over it a few hours later at the heliport?</p>	<p>After 1st November 2026 you will not be allowed to travel.</p> <p>Heliports have calibrated scales required by aviation regulations and these are regarded as the most accurate and authoritative weight.</p> <p>We hope these occasions are rare and disruption is minimal.</p> <p>You should contact your employer and operator before leaving the heliport to check their arrangements for this eventuality.</p>
<p>What if my weight fluctuates during a trip offshore?</p>	<p>Our weight always fluctuates slightly hence there is a 0.7kg margin.</p> <p>There will not be a weight restriction on the homeward helicopter flight.</p>
<p>Does the weight limit apply to return (onshore) flights?</p>	<p>No, the restriction applies only to outbound (offshore) flights.</p>

	<p>There will not be a weight restriction on the homeward helicopter flight.</p>
<p>Why is it my clothed weight that is measured and what does this mean?</p>	<p>Your clothed weight including shoes in line with the existing travel policy will be used as it is representative of how you will be dressed at work, is practical at the heliport and relates to an existing policy that is well understood.</p> <p>You should attend an OEUK medical with clothing appropriate to the clothing policy at the time of the medical.</p> <p>The fully clothing policy can be found here: https://www.stepchangeinsafety.net/resources/standard-clothing-policy/</p> <div data-bbox="716 695 1390 999" style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 10px; background-color: #333; color: white;"> <p> SUMMER</p> <p>1st June to 30th September > 10°C 2 layers (inc one long sleeve top)</p> <p>Suggested combination; t-shirt, jumper & trousers</p> </div> <div data-bbox="716 1003 1390 1308" style="border: 1px dashed black; padding: 10px; background-color: #333; color: white;"> <p> WINTER</p> <p>1st October to 31st May < 10°C 3 layers (inc one long sleeve top)</p> <p>Suggested combination; long sleeve top, short sleeve top, jumper & trousers</p> </div>
<p>What happens if somebody above 124kg is on a vessel in the 500m zone</p>	<p>Nothing. The marine industry has a different medical process and different regulations.</p> <p>The restrictions detailed here relate to offshore travel only and the OEUK medical and are not a blanket restriction.</p>
<p>Does this limit affect rescue from water?</p>	<p>No, for helicopter rescue water rescue is a life saving situation where the search and rescue teams will do everything possible to rescue people.</p> <p>They will usually use a rescue strop not a stretcher giving 29kg of additional margin, and the winchman can cut suits to release trapped water.</p> <p>The limit does improve the likelihood of rescue from the water into EERV vessels and Fast Rescue Craft which have limitations on their mechanical lifting devices.</p>

<p>Are there exceptions for critical workers?</p>	<p>In rare cases where a worker is essential for safety or critical national infrastructure, a risk assessment and additional mitigations may be considered, but this is not intended for routine operational staff</p>
<p>Does the limit apply to helicopter pilots or maintenance crew who might land on an installation or be weathered on over night.</p>	<p>No the limit applies to offshore workers assigned to roles on offshore installations who have an OEUK offshore medical.</p> <p>The frequency of pilots spending any significant on offshore installations is very limited, and the maintenance workers would fall under the exception above and are usually winched down to sort helicopters that have had technical issues on helidecks. They are not winched with a stretcher so there is plenty of margin.</p>
<p>What if somebody does not lose weight?</p>	<p>We hope all workers will chose to take the opportunity and support to lose weight but acknowledge that for some workers it may be very hard.</p> <p>Ultimately if a worker is over 124kg after the mandatory compliance date they will not be considered safe to be offshore and will not be able to work offshore.</p>
<p>What about fit and muscular people who are very fit but above 124kg</p>	<p>The weight limit is independent of fitness, health or muscle mass. If a person is above 124kg they cannot be guaranteed rescue and as such are covered by the limit. Therefore, it applies to all people.</p> <p>Research by medical experts indicates that the number of individuals in this category are likely to be smaller than first assumed but we do not have accurate data on this so OEUK will continue to monitor and consider the issue.</p> <p>One area we are investigating is whether longer duration certificates can be issued for those who are close to the weight limit but clearly have good control over their weight, healthy lifestyles etc.</p>
<p>Will the policy be reviewed or updated?</p>	<p>OEUK will continue to review the policy in light of operational experience, legal developments, and stakeholder feedback</p>
<p>If read through all of these FAQs and I am still confused about expectations, what should I do?</p>	<p>Firstly, you should contact your employer who will be able to talk with you and help you understand what it means for you and what support is available.</p> <p>You can also contact OEUK on info@oeuk.org.uk and the Health and Safety Team will answer questions.</p>