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S for safety

The simplest ideas are often the best, but they're not always that easy to sell. That's the experience of Lodewijk Westerbeek, who heads up specialist Woudenberg-based safety equipment supplier Westmark.

His company's simple idea has its origins back in the early 1970s, when he was marine paint inspector for Hempel. Working on one of the big supertankers then in drydock in Rotterdam, he stumbled over a dockside cable and came perilously close to tumbling some 15m into the dock. He became increasingly irritated by the 'masses of cables all over the place on these ships' and, with a Norwegian acquaintance of like mind, developed a range of simple S-shaped plastic hooks – now known as Cablesafe – in the hopes of bringing some order to this cable chaos.

Today Westmark's hooks are prescribed by a number of oil and gas operators and contractors for suspending hoses and cables during shutdowns and other maintenance activities. 'They see them as a simple and cost-effective means of improving site safety and cutting down lost time incidents, especially tripping accidents, onshore and off,' says Westerbeek. But although extremely simple, it took some time for the idea to take root. 'The electrical installation contractors weren't too interested because such items were not listed among their clients' requirements, so I eventually decided to go direct to their clients and started by sending out sample sets to refinery directors,' he explains. 'No-one will throw away the sample – they may throw away the documentation but not the hooks; they're ideal for hanging up a jacket in the office!'

The approach clearly worked because today Westmark counts Shell, BP and ConocoPhillips as good customers, initially through refinery applications but increasingly these days on the offshore side too. Among the industry testimonials in the company's collection is one from the senior operations supervisor and welding supervisor on a

Norwegian offshore platform praising the hooks and saying they were being specified for all that company's North Sea installations.

The largest hooks in the range also glow in the dark and these have proved popular among bigger contractors such as Heerema. 'If they are working in the legs of, say, *Balder* or *Thialf* and the electricity supply cuts out then it's pitch black down there,' says Westerbeek. 'In that event, the hooks will guide their personnel to a manhole or to a door where cables come in.' One of the company's biggest offshore orders to-date – for 1800 hooks for ExxonMobil's Kizomba project off Angola – came via Heerema.

The hooks come in three sizes – 6in, 9in and 12in – capable of taking maximum loads ranging from 40kg to 190kg and do not conduct electricity or heat. Fire testing of the two larger hook sizes at the UK's Devonport dockyard (DML) in Plymouth demonstrated that they 'retained their strength and did not show any effect from heat and fire' after having a suspended weight in excess of 200kg hung beneath them and being exposed for 20 minutes to a Kerosene-based fire which reached 200°C.

Westmark already supplies hooks to Aberdeen and other offshore centres around Europe, as well as to Kazakhstan, Alaska and, more recently, Houston where the company has secured the services of Intrepid Industries as distributor. 'I see huge potential in the Houston area and in the offshore sector generally,' say Westerbeek. 'But I'm not seeking market dominance, just success in my specific niche.' **OE**

