



Marine notice 08/2020

Working at height

Purpose

This marine notice highlights the need for shipowners, operators, masters and crews to ensure safe working arrangements are in place for any work involving height and the risk of falling.

Background

In the first six months of 2020, AMSA received ten separate incident notifications from ships that involved a fall while working at height. Two of these incidents resulted in the deaths of crewmembers who fell during cargo hold cleaning operations.

While AMSA has previously addressed this issue in a [Maritime Safety Awareness Bulletin](#), incidents involving falls from height continue to occur far too often.

Risks of working at height

Falls can occur anywhere on a ship, such as from ladders, gangways, over the side and stairs in machinery spaces. When adding slippery surfaces and ship motion, the risk of a fall is high.

Many of the serious fall from height incidents reported to AMSA involve people working in cargo holds, either while cleaning or preparing the hold for cargo, or while conducting cargo operations. These incidents can involve both ships' crew and shore-based staff such as stevedores.

Examining height safety is particularly important for the maritime industry because of the inherent risks of working aloft at sea, including slippery surfaces, extreme heights and ship motion.

As many tasks on a ship require working at height, it is crucial to control and manage the risks involved.

Recent Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) investigations into two serious incidents involving falls from height, highlighted a number of common issues. In both incidents, the work was not conducted in accordance with the existing safety management procedures or industry best practice, training was insufficient, and equipment, including fall arrest equipment, was incorrectly used.

Working at height safely

Eliminating the need to work at height is the most effective way of protecting crew from the risk of falls. However, on ships this may not always be possible, hence, effective risk control measures must be in place to mitigate or reduce the risk of a fall.

The primary risk control measures are the ship's safety management system procedures, permit to work processes and training. Procedural risk controls, such as risk assessment and permit to work systems, are essential tools to manage high-risk activities such as working at height. Using these tools helps you to identify risks and measures to control, or reduce the risk.

Physical risk control methods are also important. Temporary work platforms are one method of reducing risk when working at height. These can include scaffolds, elevating work platforms, and personnel cages lifted by cranes.

Fall arrest harnesses are an essential measure to reduce risk of injury if a fall is still possible after using other control measures.

However, all these devices need to be correctly installed and used to ensure they effectively reduce the risk of a fall.

The risk assessment should also consider what to do if something goes wrong – how will you rescue someone who is injured at height, or is suspended from fall arrest equipment?

Strategies to reduce fall incidents

It is possible to reduce the number of falls from height at sea by addressing the broader issues in height safety practices.

Managers and ships masters have a role to play in ensuring the safety of ship's crew by:

- ensuring all crew are familiar with the working at height risk assessment and procedures,
- ensuring all work at height is adequately supervised,
- ensuring safety training, including that required for working at height, is a top priority,
- ensuring permit to work systems are in place, effective, and are used,
- managing workload and ensuring that fatigue is effectively controlled.
- ensuring suitable equipment (including rescue equipment) is available for use for working at height.

Seafarers also have a responsibility to:

- follow procedures,
- ensure they use the proper safety equipment for the task at hand,
- know how to use safety equipment,
- report defects,
- not take any unnecessary risks.

Further reading

AMSA's [Maritime Safety Awareness Bulletin Issue 1](#) provides more information on height safety including identifying common safety factors.

AMSA's [Maritime Safety Awareness Bulletin Issue 6](#) provides guidance on tools and methods you can adopt to support risk identification and control.

AMSA's [Fatigue guidelines – managing and reducing the risk of fatigue at sea](#), provides more information on reducing fatigue as a factor in workplace accidents.

ATSB's investigation report [MO-2018-001 Serious injury on board Berge Daisetsu, Portland, Victoria on 11 January 2018](#) provides an analysis of a fall from height incident.

ATSB's investigation report [MO-2017-001 Fall from height and serious injuries to crewmembers on board Shanghai Spirit near Port Alma, Queensland, on 29 January 2017](#) provides an analysis of a fall from height incident.

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