



Marine notice 2021/06

Fatal accidents from falling off pilot ladders on ships

Purpose

This marine notice highlights the obligation of shipowners, operators, masters and crew to ensure safe arrangements are in place when embarking or disembarking a vessel using a pilot ladder.

Background

Transfers using pilot ladders are high risk activities. Fatalities have occurred when crew have fallen to their deaths while climbing up or down pilot ladders.

In August 2021, AMSA received notification of the death of a crewmember who fell into the water while climbing down the pilot ladder of a bulk carrier to board a crew transfer boat. That same day, the crewmember had signed off the vessel to go home.

Managing risks

Embarking and disembarking a vessel using a pilot ladder is a high-risk activity. Failing to provide safe access can be fatal.

A risk assessment for safe transfer of people by pilot ladder, or other means, should be part of the vessel's safety management system.

Pilot ladders and associated equipment must comply with international standards (SOLAS V/23), be certified and properly maintained.

When considering the risk of use of a pilot ladder for transfer, as a minimum, attention should be given to:

- The experience and capability of people using the pilot ladder
- The physical demands of using a pilot ladder
- Sea state and weather conditions
- The ability of a launch or other vessel to act as a platform to safely transfer people to or from a pilot ladder
- Measures to prevent falls
- Emergency response if a person using the pilot ladder falls
- Use of other means of transfer which present a lower risk in the circumstances, such as a helicopter.

Further reading

AMSA's [Maritime Safety Awareness Bulletin issue 10—Safe vessel access](#) provides further guidance on safe access including information on managing risks.

[Marine notice 3/2019 – Pilot transfer arrangements.](#)

Australian Transport Safety Bureau. Investigation Report into [the fall from the pilot ladder on the bulk carrier *Atlantic Princess*, Whyalla, South Australia on 3 July 2013 300-MO-2013-007](#)

Sachi Wimmer
Deputy Chief Executive Officer
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Australian Maritime Safety Authority
GPO Box 2181
CANBERRA ACT 2601