



Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Search and Rescue Helicopter Hi-Line Technique

Notice to Owners and Masters of Merchant Vessels, Owners and Skippers of Fishing Vessels and Masters of Yachts and all other Sea-going Vessels.

Summary

This notice draws attention to mariners of a technique employed by Search and Rescue helicopter crews to recover a casualty from a vessel under certain conditions.

High-Line Technique

In certain weather conditions it may not be possible to winch the helicopter Winchman or the strop (rescue harness) from a position directly above a vessel to the vessel's deck. Under such circumstances a weighted rope extension to the winch wire may be lowered to the vessel. This extension is known as a Hi-Line Heaving-in Line and is connected via a weak link to the aircraft's winch hook.

When the Hi-Line technique is used, once the weighted line is placed on the deck, one crew member must handle the line. **He should take up the slack on the Hi-Line and haul in ONLY when instructed to do so by the helicopter crew by radio message or hand signal. The Hi-Line must NOT be secured to any part of the vessel.** A second crew member should coil the slack line into a bucket or similar container clear of obstructions. It is advisable for the handling crew to wear protective gloves to prevent rope burns. If the helicopter has to break away during the operation the line must be paid out or, if necessary, released completely ensuring that the line passes clear outboard.

As the Hi-Line is paid out, the helicopter will move to one side of the vessel and descend.

Normally the winchman will be winched out; the ship's crew should continue to take in the slack. As the winchman or strop approach the vessel the earthing lead or hook must make contact with the vessel to discharge the static electricity before the vessel's crew make contact with the wire. Considerable effort may be needed when pulling the Winchman onboard.

Once the casualty has been secured in the strop, the Winchman, if he is present, or a member of the vessel's crew, should indicate that all is ready by making a hand signal. The helicopter will commence to winch in the wire. As this occurs a crew member should pay out the Hi-Line, maintaining sufficient firmness to prevent any swing. If the operation involves a single recovery the Hi-Line should be released once the end is reached. If further winching is required to take place then the crew member should maintain a hold on the Hi-Line and repeat the process for the next lift.

If multiple lifts are required two strops may be delivered with the hook and it is required that a casualty is placed into both strops in the normal manner.

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October 2000

MC 23/1/01



*An executive agency of the Department of the
Environment, Transport and the Regions*