
Safety during Transfers of Persons to and from Ships

Notice to all Owners, Operators and Masters of Merchant Ships, Large Commercial Yachts, Fishing Vessels, Small Commercial Vessels and Pleasure Vessels.

This Notice replaces MGN 127.

PLEASE NOTE:-

Where this document provides guidance on the law it should not be regarded as definitive. The way the law applies to any particular case can vary according to circumstances - for example, from vessel to vessel and you should consider seeking independent legal advice if you are unsure of your own legal position.

Summary

The purpose of this Note is to provide guidance for all vessels engaged in transfers of persons at anchor or underway as regards: taking the necessary precautions, use of trained persons and carriage of requisite equipment to aid a safe transfer and rapid recovery of a casualty from the water.

1. Introduction

Pilots and Pilotage Authorities regularly undertake transfer of persons between vessels at sea, and it is recommended that this guidance should be read in conjunction SOLAS Ch V, Regulation 23. However this guidance is predominantly aimed at those who are not experienced in such transfers.

There have been accidents, some fatal, whilst transferring persons between vessels making way. A fatal accident occurred on the River Humber when a mooring assistant fell whilst transferring between a tug and tanker after losing his footing and grip on a ladder. More recently a naval officer fell into the River Thames when transferring by ladder from a frigate to a Class V passenger vessel. With the smaller vessel secured forward, the painter parted and, as the two vessels separated, the ladder spreader became trapped in the bulwark of the smaller vessel.

The key lessons from such incidents are that trained and fully briefed persons should be used to conduct transfers with appropriate risk assessments carried out and strict operational procedures followed - particularly in cold, wet and adverse sea conditions. These measures will assist in preventing accidents and ensure a rapid recovery from the sea should this occur.

Personnel transfer should always be carried out in accordance with the Merchant Shipping (Means of Access) Regulations 1988 (SI no. 1637) and relevant guidance, including the Code

of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seamen and the Code of Safe Practice for the boarding and landing of pilots, SOLAS V as amended.

Wherever possible transfer of persons should take place with the vessel secured at a berth via an accommodation ladder/gangway. However it is recognised that sometimes it is unavoidable to undertake transfers of persons at sea.

Transfers at anchor

Transfer of persons, other than those specially trained in the use of pilot ladders, from/to a vessel at anchor should be carried out in accordance with relevant guidance using proven arrangements e.g. accommodation ladder(if provided)/pilot ladder /combination of an accommodation ladder and pilot ladder as appropriate. However there may be circumstances where use of an accommodation ladder is considered to be unsafe as it may result in damage to the launch and/or the ladder, or other operational reasons why a transfer alongside cannot be undertaken

Transfers when underway

Except where a vessel has a specially designed and dedicated passenger transfer system the transfer of persons (other than those experienced in the use of pilot ladders) from/to vessels which are not secured alongside or at anchor should not be attempted unless it is unavoidable. Means of transfer should be carried out in accordance with relevant guidance using proven arrangements e.g. accommodation ladder (if provided)/pilot ladder /combination of an accommodation ladder and pilot ladder as appropriate. Where appropriate, both vessels should make way at the slowest speed necessary to provide a lee and/or a more stable platform with the Masters of both vessels mindful of the possible effects of interaction between the vessels.

Masters should agree beforehand which vessel is the controlling vessel during the evolution. Often it is the larger of the two vessels which assumes control when, in reality, it would more appropriate for the receiving vessel to confirm as safe and readiness to receive personnel.

2. Before the Transfer

The following should be considered prior to any transfer not alongside a berth:

- (i) A risk assessment of the transfer activity should be undertaken and appropriate safety measures put into place to ensure the safety of those involved in accordance with the general duties under the MS (Health and Safety at Work) Regulations 1997.
- (ii) A briefing on board both ships is to be held for key personnel involved in the transfer focussing on at least the following:
 - a) number, experience and mobility of the persons to be transferred;
 - b) the type of boat being used and the resulting requirement for ropes, securing points painters and fenders;
 - c) the designated side for transfer;
 - d) any navigational / time constraints;
 - e) the expected weather conditions;
 - f) required clothing and life saving equipment for persons and ship teams;
 - g) type of ladder to be used i.e. pilot ladder or combination arrangement and associated safety requirements available including manropes, rescue strops and lines for equipment and luggage;
 - h) actions required in the event of man overboard; and
 - i) the Masters or Skippers of both vessels and the persons being transferred should be content for the transfer to take place

- (iii) Before any transfer, the suitability of the type of transfer for individuals, in terms of their physical fitness and experience, needs to be assessed by the Masters of the vessels. If a person is not physically capable or mobile enough, they should not be transferred. Those being transferred should be briefed and fully understand the sequence of events including the correct use of pilot ladder, appropriate attire, donning of personal flotation device and use of the marine rescue strop.

A personal flotation device (such as an approved self-inflating life jacket with light and whistle and fitted with a crotch strap or equivalent) rather than a conventional, SOLAS approved solid lifejacket is recommended as the latter may make movement via, accommodation ladders, and especially pilot ladders, restrictive and hence more hazardous.

3. During the Transfer

Lifejackets should be donned before going out on deck in order to avoid the potential of having to do so on a crowded bow area or similar on a small boat.

The following are strongly recommended during transfers when the ship is not alongside a berth:

- 1) Wearing of lifejackets by all involved on deck and the persons being transferred;
- 2) Unless the boat conducting the transfer is very small or has an inflatable sponson (such as RIBs or inflatable boats), fenders are to be used at all times;
- 3) For transfers using a pilot ladder, it is advisable to use a safety harness (or a marine rescue strop). It is to be noted that these could be dangerous in a swell as precision timing and communications between the person on the ladder and the person tending the rescue strop would be required. It is also to be noted that the manufacturer's instructions need to be referred to check the feasibility of their use in conjunction with a lifejacket.
- 4) The person being transferred should not carry any bags or luggage – any such items should be separately transferred to the vessel;
- 5) A lifebuoy (with man overboard marker) is to be made available and at night the transfer area is to be illuminated (the lifebuoy should additionally have a lifebuoy light attached);
- 6) Only one person at a time allowed on a ladder;
- 7) Where practicable manropes must be provided;
- 8) A pilot ladder must never be placed within the bulwark of the boat;
- 9) It should be ensured that there are clear, safe areas for persons to embark and disembark between vessels;
- 10) When using a pilot ladder, the boats should be manoeuvred to ensure lee for lowering persons; and
- 11) Personnel to be always available at the conning position, with availability of engines, with clear communication available between the person at the conning position and those assisting in the transfer. There should also be a clear understanding between all those taking part of the meaning of all terminology used in the transfer.

Commonly agreed retrieval procedures should be in place before a transfer is undertaken while making way.

4. Rescue of persons - Information and Guidance

On vessels not equipped with a rescue boat a detailed assessment of available retrieval equipment should be undertaken. The Workboat Code specifies retrieval equipment that is carried. Small tugs and similar vessels with less than five persons in the crew may be exempted from carrying a rescue boat. The exemption is conditional on the following:

- a) the adequate manoeuvrability of the vessel;
- b) the provision of an overside ladder;
- c) the provision of some means to recover an unconscious person; and
- d) the crew being trained and practised in man overboard procedures.

Any vessel acting as its own rescue boat must demonstrate to the MCA surveyor issuing the certification the practical effectiveness of its retrieval system as follows:

a suitably clad person of at least 82.5kg or a manikin of equivalent mass must be recovered from the water under normal operating conditions. If a person is to be used in the test then that person must not assist the rescue crew in any way.

On all but very low freeboard vessels some form of recovery systems will almost certainly be essential. (For low freeboard vessels nets have proven effective - especially those incorporating a parbuckle action). Recovery systems include:

- a) a scoop system developed from the net technique which can be effective but demands a certain degree of operator skill to be successful;
- b) the use of a tackle to hoist the person out of the water which is effective but relies on attaching a strop or harness to the person and a suitably positioned eye or davit arm for the top block; and
- c) an adaptation of a boat hook is available which incorporates a loop which, once fitted around the person, forms a lifting harness attached to a two-fold purchase.

The effectiveness of any retrieval system depends on training and practice. Operators are reminded of the requirements of the Merchant Shipping (Musters, Training and Decision Support Systems) Regulations 1999.

This notice should be read in conjunction with section 18.7.5 of the Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seamen.

More Information

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