

FISHING ACCIDENT REPORT

CREW FALL INTO FISH HOLD



Using jury-rigged lifting gear on board a 35m trawler, two deckhands were being lifted out of the fish hold when they slipped and fell back down a distance of more than 4m. Both of the deckhands were taken to hospital with serious injuries.

The trawler had just finished landing her catch when the accident happened. Although the vessel had a hydraulic crane, with which to land the catch, the crew thought it was too slow. To speed up landing operations, the crew made up their own rigging, arrangement for lowering and lifting the catch in and out of the hold.

Access to the fish hold was by means of a portable ladder, but the crew rarely used it, as it was heavy and cumbersome and stowed some distance away from the fish hold hatch. Normally, the crew climbed in and out of the hold, but on this occasion, the last two deckhands chose to use the lifting gear. They clipped the fish box lifting hooks together to make a stirrup into which they each placed a foot. They then shouted up to the main deck to hoist. The winchman heard the shouts to lift and began lifting. When the two deckhands were level with the main deck, their feet slipped from the stirrup and they fell back into the fish hold. One of the deckhand's fall was broken on the way down and he was able to get out of the fish hold by himself. The other deckhand fell straight to the bottom of the fish hold and, when the other crew reached him, he was found unconscious. The deckhands were taken to hospital where they were kept for 4 days.



Lessons

The obvious cause of this accident was the misuse of the lifting gear. Dangerous misuse of various equipment on fishing vessels is not uncommon and in many cases can be attributed to a macho image some fishermen wish to portray. Skippers of fishing vessels should ensure that their crew use the correct equipment provided for any task onboard. If the equipment proves impractical bring it to the skipper's/ owner's attention so that something can be done about it.

Designing a fish hold with only one means of access on a vessel of this size must be questioned. While loading or unloading a catch, access in or out of the hold is restricted. To ventilate such a space quickly, or exit it in an emergency, two means of access are necessary, as detailed in the guidance proposed for vessels over 25 metres.

In 2005, the Merchant Shipping and Fishing Vessel (Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment) Regulations, known as LOLER, will come into force. The regulations will require the lifting gear to be marked with its safe working load and will ban the use of lifting gear to hoist crew members, the consequences of which have been shown in this case.

On a general note on safety, there were a number of items which demonstrated the crew's attitude to safety was poor:

- The skipper had not intervened to stop the unsafe practice of hoisting deckhands out of the hold by the lifting gear.
- The portable ladder, which provided access to the fish hold was heavy and difficult to deploy. It could have been replaced with a lighter one.
- The fish hold hatch was not roped off, which would have prevented anyone from accidentally falling into it.

Complacency costs lives.