

Fix it before the fall!

Consider the risks of falling from heights below deck.

While ascending from a bulk carrier's cargo hold no. 3, a 52 year old stevedore sustained serious injuries after falling 20 feet (6 meters) from the cargo hold's fixed vertical ladder onto the cargo hold's tank top. He was found face down and unconscious.

This incident resulted from the stevedore having grasped a weakened wooden batten board at the top of the ladderwell that broke while trying to climb off of the ladder. At the time of the incident, the ladderwell configuration offered no better option to hold onto at the top of the ladder.

A few months later, a similar incident transpired. In this instance, a 54 year old stevedore descended into cargo hold no. 2 and fell from the fixed ladderwell platform. As in the prior incident, it was discovered that the ladderwell hold design and configuration did not provide sufficient hand holds at the top of the ladder to prevent his falling. Eventually, modifications were made in order to ensure that grip bars above the ladder were installed above the ladder as seen in the figure.



Actual Injuries: The stevedores sustained neurological, orthopedic, psychological injuries and one of them was rendered a quadriplegic.

Potential Risks: *Serious bodily injury or death.* Working inside a ship's cargo hold or tank may not always be regarded as working aloft but presents many of the same hazards. Some vertical ladders in cargo holds may be narrow, cramped, poorly lit, humid and uncomfortable. Members should consider proper safeguards that can prevent or reduce the possibility of such falls.

Recommendations

Inspection and maintenance

- *The crew should inspect cargo hold access areas prior to cargo operations and only present the vessel in a condition that stevedores can load and discharge the cargo with reasonable safety.* Ladder's standing platforms, grip bars, rungs/treads, railings are free of dust, cargo debris, oily or greasy surfaces or any other condition that can cause a slippery condition.
- *Any latent hazards discovered by the crew are best corrected and repaired prior to commencement of cargo operations.* If any of the ladder's standing platforms, grip bars, rungs/treads, railings, etc. are in disrepair, do not use the ladder until it is fully repaired.

- *The crew should advise the stevedores of any latent defects before the commencement of cargo operations.* If the hazards are not adequately repaired at the time, they should be marked and identified with proper signage, and/or pointed out by the mate or hatch boss on duty.
- *Ensure adequate lighting is in place in the access areas to cargo hold ladders and in the ladderwell.* Portable lights should be properly suspended and secured by separate lines and not by the lighting power cord. The lights should be rigged so they do not hinder the climber when using the ladder.

“Three Points of Contact” Rule

- *The climber should always face the ladder and grip ladder rungs or side rails with two hands while bracing with one foot, or brace with two feet and grip with one hand.* It is safest for climbers to use this “three points of contact” rule at all times during ascent, descent, and working on the ladder. In this way, the climber is not likely to become unstable in the event one limb slips during the climb. The use of personal fall arrest equipment or a lifeline should be considered when the top of the fixed ladder is greater than 24 feet (7 meters) or if three point contact rule cannot be maintained.

Familiarization

- *As practicable as possible, know the customs and practices of the stevedores.* The interplay and relationship between stevedores and ship’s crew on safety can vary depending on the cargo being carried, the type of trade for the ship, the ports where the ship calls, and the union(s) to which the stevedores may belong. The crew should do their best to familiarize themselves with the customs and practices of each stevedore in ports they trade to regularly.

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