

Every Step Matters- Pilot Boarding Safety

Guidance on required boarding arrangements for pilots

Claims experience over the past five years includes several injury incidents resulting from embarking and disembarking from a vessel's pilot ladder. Falls overboard are also not uncommon. While they are less likely to be fatal, tragedies still periodically occur. Worldwide, harbor pilots experience an average of 2-3 fatalities per year as a result of transfer accidents.



Pilot operations present a number of inherent safety risks which could result in serious physical injury to the pilot. The ship's physical characteristics, boarding arrangement, and most importantly the actions of the ship's officers and crew all play a vital role in ensuring the pilot's personal safety, and successful pilot transfers.

IMPA Safety Campaign

The International Maritime Pilot's Association (IMPA) conducted its annual pilot ladder safety survey in October 2016. The purpose of the survey is to monitor compliance levels and draw to the industry's attention to the defects that pilots encounter when boarding and disembarking vessels. The study included more than 2,700 vessels of various types, spanning five geographical regions of the world. Your Managers recommend that Members review the full report on vessel compliance statistics, [2016 IMPA Safety Campaign Brochure](#). The data is categorized non-compliant defects by type and frequency of occurrence. Some of the more frequent defects were:

Defects of pilot ladder

- Not against ship's hull
- Steps not of suitable material
- Poorly rigged retrieval line
- Steps broken
- Steps not equally spaced
- Pilot Ladder more than 9 meters
- Steps dirty/slippery
- Side-ropes not of suitable material
- Pilot Ladder too far forward/Aft
- Steps painted
- Incorrect step fittings
- No bulwark ladder
- Steps not horizontal

Defects of bulwark/deck

- No handhold stanchions
- Faulty handhold stanchions
- Ladder not secured properly

Safety equipment defects

- Inadequate lighting at night
- No lifebuoy with self-igniting light
- No VHF communication with the bridge
- No heaving line
- No responsible officer in attendance

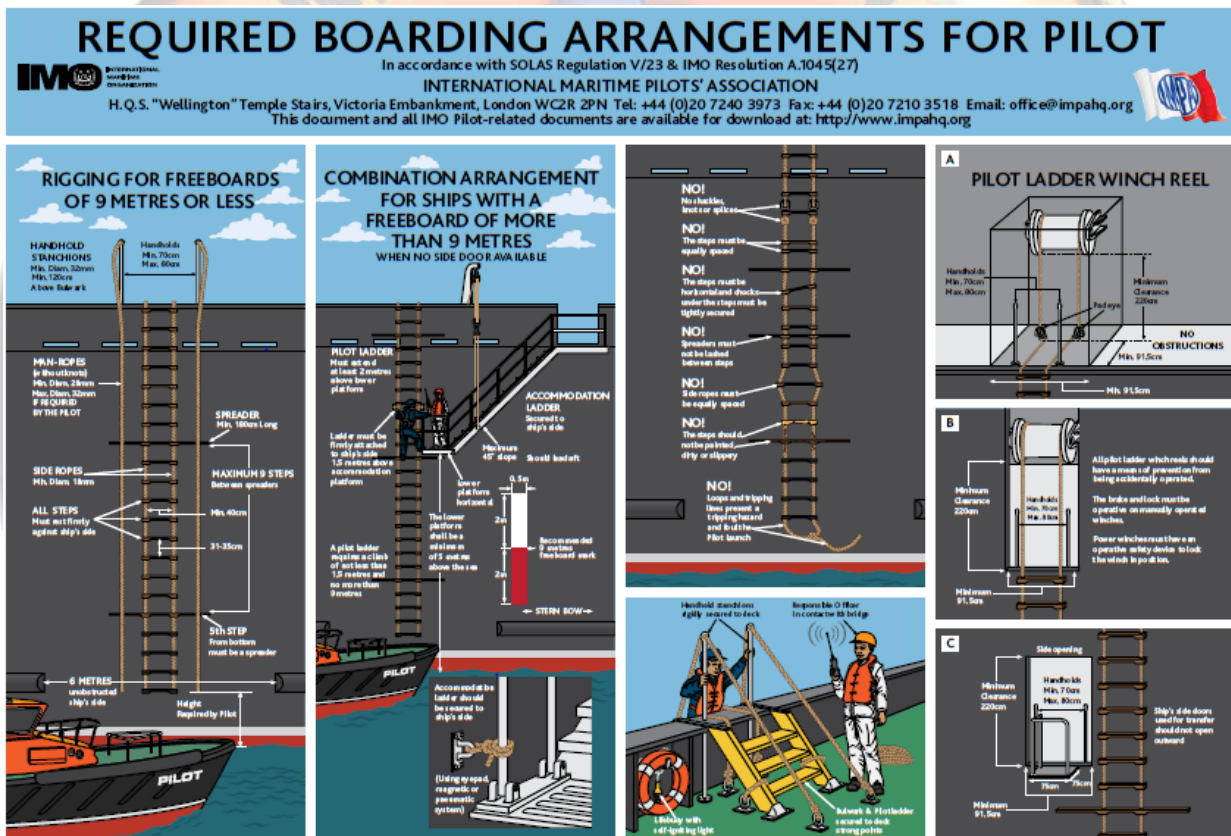
Combination of defects

- Lower platform stanchions/rail incorrect rigged
- Accommodation ladder too steep (>45 degrees)
- Pilot ladder not attached 1.5m above accommodation ladder
- Lower platform not horizontal
- Ladder(s) not secured to ship's side
- Lower platform less than 5 meters above the sea

Pilot Ladder Arrangements

All arrangements used for pilot transfer should efficiently fulfill their purpose of enabling pilots to embark and disembark safely. The most common rigging consists of a designated pilot ladder of SOLAS type-approved design and construction. The steps should have adequate non-skid, and no more than two replacement, steps which are secured in position by a method different from that used in the original construction of the ladder. Pilot ladders should only be used for pilot operations and stored and covered when not in use.

Regulation 23 of Chapter V of the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention sets out the principal requirements for the rigging of pilot ladders in a colorful diagram as seen in the IMPA poster below, *Required Boarding Arrangements for Pilot*. The latest version of this poster is available in English, Spanish, French, or Chinese and can be downloaded, free of charge at <http://www.impahq.org/downloads.php>.



Safe Rigging Precautions

Seafarers should always check the condition of the ladder and lines before they are rigged under vessel planned maintenance practices. Throughout the rigging process, seafarers should always take care of their own safety, wearing a life jacket (and a life-line or safety harness if appropriate). There should be measures in place to ensure the utmost safety of the ship's crew during the rigging, use, and de-rigging of any pilot transfer arrangements.

Shore-side Management

Vessel Superintendents or Designated Persons Ashore (DPAs) should ensure that:

- Ladders are SOLAS compliant
- The inspection and maintenance regime and records are adequate and compliant
- Replacement ladders are quickly and readily available on board
- Seafarers involved receive the necessary training and have a full understanding of the requirements
- Compliance with SMS procedures where port entry and departure is concerned
- Audits are carried out frequently

On Board Responsibilities

Pilot ladders fall into disrepair and are not afforded the maintenance they deserve perhaps because they are not actually utilized by the crew. Adopting a “maintain it like your life depended on it” approach on board could very well make a difference. The ship’s master and officers should additionally be sure to:

- Closely supervise the rigging of pilot ladders and ensure there is no fault with the ladder
- Ensure the area where the pilot steps into, is clear of any obstruction
- Closely observe the shipping/landing of pilots from ladders, ensuring that SOLAS requirements are met
- Maintain a lee until the pilot vessel is well clear
- Avoid main engine movements when the pilot boat is alongside
- Follow guidance notes for the rigging of pilot ladders
- Ensure accommodation ladders/gangways are overhauled recurrently and suitable for use in pilotage operations.

Safe pilot transfers are truly the result of cooperation between vessel management and the pilot. Adequately maintained equipment, good procedures, and sound judgement all come into play with successful pilot transfers. Ships must do their part by ensuring safe and proper boarding arrangements and pilot operations, remembering that “Every step matters”.

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