



# GOOD CATCH from **The American Club**

## Hand Injury & Hatch

### Description

**The crew of a coastal tug was preparing to get underway.** They had loaded onboard all the supplies they had needed including a large grocery order. The tug's engineer and a shore-based mechanic had just finished some minor repairs and engine room maintenance items. While they were at the dock, the engineers had opened the emergency escape hatch to the main deck to allow for ventilation. The weather had been great, and it felt good to get some cool fresh air into the engine room.

The crew was busy stowing the supplies and getting ready for the planned ocean transit. The weather was expected to be typical for that time of year. The forecast called for seas at 3-5 feet and steady winds of 12-15 knots with scattered afternoon squalls and thunderstorms.

One of the deckhands decided to close the open hatch cover to the engine room emergency escape. He released the safety catch and started to lower the hatch. He saw that the hatch cover had a spring counterbalance and assumed that he may have to lean on the hatch cover to get it closed all the way. Instead, the heavy hatch slammed rapidly and unexpectedly closed and caught his hand. He screamed in pain but was able to lift the hatch enough to release his hand. It was immediately obvious that he had seriously injured it. It immediately started to swell and discolor, and he could not move his fingers. The injured deckhand was quickly sent to the emergency room for medical treatment.

The investigation found that the spring counterbalance was inoperative and was on the worklist to be fixed during the next shipyard period. The engineers on the vessel were aware that the spring counterbalance did not work. They had reported it to the vessel superintendent who had added it to the shipyard worklist. It took 2 of the engineers to open it, but the fresh air was welcome. They had planned to close it carefully before they vessel got underway, but the deckhand beat them to it. The deckhand was not aware that the counterbalance was not functional.



### Actual Injury

**The crushing injury to the deckhand's left hand resulted in 4 broken bones. He needed surgery on his hand that involved numerous pins and screws. He was unable to work for almost 6 months and required extensive physical therapy to regain full use of his hand.**

# Potential Injury

The crushing injury could have caused permanent damage to the mariner's hand. The failed counterbalance had additional potential to cause injury or death. Had there been an emergency in the engine room that required the use of the escape hatch, a single person would have been unable to lift it from the inside. In an emergency, a crew member could have been trapped in the engine room with dire consequences.

# Prevention

- ★ Mariners should exercise care with emergency escape hatch covers to ensure that hold-open devices, safety catches, and counterbalances function properly and have not corroded or been damaged.
- ★ The failure or inoperability of any equipment associated with emergency escape or emergency response should be immediately addressed. Repair should not be delayed until a future repair period.
- ★ Even the temporary inoperability of emergency equipment or emergency escape hatches should be clearly communicated to the entire crew. Further, steps should be taken immediately to address the increased risk from the malfunctioning equipment.

When you identify a hazard before something goes wrong...

**it's a Good Catch.**

When you stop an operation before something bad happens...

**it's a Good Catch.**

When the failure of a counterbalance on an emergency escape hatch is identified and communicated to all crew members, and temporary measures are put in place to address that increased risk...

**that's a Good Catch, too!**



The American Club would like to specially thank [Independent Maritime Consulting, LLC](#) for their contribution to this document.



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