



GOOD CATCH from **The American Club**

Mariners Forced to Walk the Plank

(Accommodation Ladder)

Description

In a throwback to the “Golden Age of Piracy,” modern mariners were forced to walk the plank. The Captain said that the crew was fine with that arrangement, but his comments were suspect because of his peg leg, patch on one eye, and the parrot sitting on his shoulder.

OK...maybe we made that part up. What really happened was . . .

A general cargo vessel arrived at its terminal destination to load cargo and found that the vessel's accommodation ladder would not swing out to the dock. A wooden plank arrangement was rigged without any handrails and was put in place by the bosun with the full knowledge of the vessel's Master and Chief Officer. The pilot who helped bring the vessel into port refused to disembark using the wooden plank arrangement. Instead, he called for the pilot boat and disembarked the vessel using the pilot ladder on the other side of the vessel.

Believing it to be very dangerous, the pilot notified the local Port State Control authorities. Port State Control officers visited the vessel and immediately issued 2 deficiencies and detained the vessel due to non-compliance with their safety management system (SMS). They instructed the vessel to prohibit anyone from using that wooden plank arrangement and required them to rig a safer arrangement. The noted deficiencies were based on the unsafe embarkation arrangement, and the vessel not following their safety management system procedures regarding safe access. The Port State Control authorities required an audit of their SMS to be conducted prior to the vessel departing because they viewed this as a major nonconformity in the SMS because the embarkation arrangement was so dangerous.



Actual Damage

No one was actually injured, and no one fell into the water, but this was an accident waiting to happen. The quick decision to prohibit the use of the wooden plank was a large factor in no one getting injured.

The vessel was detained for 3 days until an International Safety Management (ISM) Code auditor traveled to the vessel, completed the SMS audit, and issued the audit report.

Potential Damages

A fall from the wooden plank could very likely have resulted in a serious injury or fatality. A person could have fallen, hit their head on the plank or any of several concrete and steel parts of the dock, or been crushed between the hull and the dock. The strong river current in that area and the lack of a ladder fixed to the dock increased the risk of drowning. Additionally, the water was 43° F (6° C), so anyone falling into the water was at risk for hypothermia.

Prevention

- ★ What alternatives could have been used instead of a wooden plank to span the gap between the dock and the bottom of the accommodation ladder?
- ★ What do you do when faced with an expedient but unsafe solution to a problem?
- ★ Does your vessel allow for any crewmember to call a stop to the work due to safety concerns?

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 you recognize a serious safety concern with the embarkation arrangement and raise that concern so it can be corrected...

that's a Good Catch, too!



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