

## Drop the flip-flop!

### *The dangers of wearing sandals, open toe shoes, and flip-flops onboard a working vessel.*

Description of "near" incident: Upon boarding a vessel for survey, a P&I surveyor, was greeted at the gangway by a ship's officer who was observed wearing flip-flops. The surveyor immediately pointed out this hazard and the ship's officer donned the appropriate footwear shortly thereafter.

Actual injuries: No injuries resulted from this occurrence as the seafarer promptly corrected his mistake.

Potential risks: Improper footwear is a frequent cause for many slips, trips and falls type incidents.

- Sandals and flip-flops with spongy soles do not provide adequate surface traction or support for the feet including arches and ankles. The toes and foot are exposed to external hazards, falling objects and possible punctures of sharp objects to either the exposed foot in sandals, open toe shoes, or through the spongy flip-flop material.
- Flip-flops are not adequately secured to the foot as they rely upon the grip between the big toe and second toe to stay in place. Flip-flops are particularly hazardous on shipboard surfaces that may be slippery or sticky.
- Accidents are caused by flip-flops slipping off the foot and potentially causing the wearer to trip and fall. The introduction of slick residue exposure in the work environment on the foot could increase this risk.
- Sandals, open toe shoes and flip-flops are not appropriate for cold or wet weather and leave the toes and feet exposed to the elements. The occurrence of a slip, trip or fall provides little to no protection from potential stubbed toes, abrasions, cuts, bruises, burns or puncture wounds.
- In addition to slip and trip hazards, sandals, open toe shoes and flip-flops provide no protection from heavy items or chemicals dropped on the foot.



### Recommendations

- The correct use of personal protective equipment (PPE) apparel should be written into the safety management system (SMS) manual. If the crew member was wearing non-protective footwear, such as flip-flops, it may mean that he is not familiar with the SMS manual where PPE is concerned. Senior officers aboard ship should advise the crew of correct apparel policy reflected in the SMS manual.
- Choosing the appropriate footwear for the shipboard work environment is essential! Proper safety footwear should be worn at all times in work areas that should:
  - have low heels and slip resistant soles;
  - be the proper size and grip the heel firmly; and
  - be steel capped and cover the entire foot for protection against the potential risks as specified above.

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