



MARINE SAFETY ALERT

Inspections and Compliance Directorate

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Safety Alert 02-02

LOADING OF CANISTER TYPE LIFE RAFTS

Recently a 16-man liferaft canister weighing 375 pounds was accidentally released from its cradle while being loaded in a West Coast port. The canister fell approximately 50-feet onto an engineering service technician who was departing the vessel. The technician suffered massive internal injuries and passed away several hours later at a local hospital. At the time of the incident, two port side life raft canisters were being stowed onto a duplex cradle. The liferafts had just been returned from their routine annual inspection and servicing at a local facility.

The liferaft cradle holds two canisters and utilizes two independent releasing mechanisms. Upon release, the liferaft will fall over the side of the vessel. During loading, there were two accidental releases of the canisters. Although the investigation is not yet complete, the sequence of events may have been as follows:

The first canister was loaded onto the cradle and the second canister was being lowered into position. During this process one of the individuals involved bumped the releasing handle of the canister already in place causing it to fall off the vessel's port side and onto the dock. Shortly afterwards, another person involved examined the releasing mechanism for the second canister. He noticed that the releasing lever was not seated securely. In an effort to prevent the remaining raft from falling, he attempted to move the lever and seat it into its locked notched position. As he moved the lever it sprang open releasing the second canister from its cradle. It plummeted from the vessel and stuck the service technician below.

The Coast Guard strongly recommends that vessel owners and operators utilizing gravity type liferaft release mechanisms or other equipment with similar operating characteristics:

- Review and develop, if necessary, procedures for safe loading of liferafts, particularly when there is danger associated with accidental release.
- Review and develop, if necessary, training based on the safe loading procedures and ensure individuals associated with liferaft loading operations are trained.
- Ensure that each liferaft canister is immediately secured in place using a line, chain or other method when loading or conducting maintenance on the canister, releasing mechanisms or cradles.
- Prohibit use of releasing system hardware as the only means to secure the canister in place during loading, maintenance and repair activities.
- Secure dock and vessel areas within the release zone anytime that maintenance is conducted on lifesaving systems located at the deck edge or when equipment is not stowed as designed. Similar precautions should be taken whenever work of any kind is taking place at the deck edge above other decks or dock areas where people may be present.

- Require only authorized persons to conduct a thorough inspection and safety assessment of the equipment and surrounding areas prior to securing, loading or any other associated maintenance activities.

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