



MARINE SAFETY ALERT

Inspections and Compliance Directorate

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Washington, DC

Safety Alert 03-98

REDUCING THE RISK OF FALLS OVERBOARD

The test of any gambler is the size of the stake he'll place on what he feels is a sure thing. Perhaps the average sailor is overly optimistic about the odds because he too often sees those who've gambled and won while the Coast Guard statistics reflect those who've gambled and lost. The large percentage of persons lost each year from falling overboard from all classes of vessels and boats indicates that sailors and boatmen fare poorly as gamblers, especially those who are working without a personal flotation device where the risk of falling overboard is high. Daily, summaries and news accounts tell of rescue efforts performed by the Coast Guard, local police, and rescue squads which attempted to locate persons who were lost overboard from tugs, barges, pleasure craft, docks, and large commercial vessels.

- What are your chances of survival if you fall overboard without being seen?
- If you are injured or dazed before you fall overboard?
- If the water temperature is extreme?
- If the time for the rescue forces to reach you takes over a few minutes?

No matter how high the risks under normal conditions, they are surely a great deal higher when you are not wearing a personal flotation device! We all, at times, have to take a chance on a long shot, but we don't have to bet our lives on it.

A case in point involved the death of a seaman who fell overboard at sea while rigging an accommodation ladder. As the ship was preparing to enter port, the seaman was detailed to release the toggle pins which held the ladder in a horizontal position along-side the vessel. As he bent over, the ship rolled, tossing him into the water. Investigation revealed that the man was not wearing a life preserver or work vest, nor did he have any safety lines rigged.

Subsequent to the tragedy, the steamship company implemented a number of operating procedures designed to prevent a similar casualty. Seamen are now required to wear a life preserver or work vest and to use a safety harness and line when working over the side. In addition, a deck officer supervises the operation and the master is authorized to slow the ship and seek a lee while this evolution takes place. Professional mariners realize that rigging an accommodation ladder is one of the more hazardous procedures a seaman must routinely face. Virtually all ships are required to rig an accommodation ladder every time they approach a port. To reduce the hazards for your shipmates, answer the following questions:

- Are seamen on my ships required to periodically work over the side?
- Are procedures followed which insure their safety when they do work over the side?
- Are Coast Guard approved work vests stowed in an accessible location?
- Are the work vests in good condition?
- Are my masters reluctant to slow down when men are working over the side?

If these questions are answered in the interests of personnel safety, the lessons from this casualty will be put to good use. This safety alert is provided for informational purpose only and does not relieve any domestic or international safety, operational or material requirement. Developed by the Office of Investigations and Casualty Analysis. For questions or concerns please email hqs-pf-flldr-cg-inv@uscg.mil