



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

MARINE SAFETY ALERT

Inspections & Compliance Directorate

September 2, 2026
Washington, DC

Safety Alert 12-26

CHECK MATERIAL CONDITION OF AGING FIBERGLASS LIFEBOATS

This Safety Alert addresses the importance of verifying the material condition of lifeboat fiberglass structures, metal components, and the hook release systems that secure lifeboats to ship davits. The Coast Guard is investigating a marine casualty in which a lifeboat suffered a fiberglass failure at the base of the hook release during launch, causing it to fall into the water and resulting in a total loss. This failure occurred despite regular, manufacturer-recommended inspections.



Figure 1: Damaged hook.

Lifeboats launched by falls use a hook release system that allows the boat to be detached from the lowering cables. In this case, while the lifeboat was being lowered, the fiberglass supporting the forward hook assembly failed, allowing the metal backing plate to pull free from the base. This caused the locking mechanism to rotate and the hook to open, which allowed the lifeboat to be unintentionally released.

The U.S. Coast Guard determined that the lifeboat was constructed in June 2002, making it 23 years old at the time of the incident. Neither current U.S. regulations nor the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) requirements specify a maximum service life for lifeboats, and in this case, the manufacturer also did not provide a recommended service life for this model. However, the lifeboat's age and extended exposure to the marine environment contributed to the degradation and eventual failure of its fiberglass structure.

The Coast Guard **strongly recommends** that lifeboat owners, operators, manufacturers, and service providers:

- Follow the guidance in U.S. Coast Guard [Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circular 03-19](#) and conduct thorough inspections of release mechanisms, focusing on hook assemblies, to identify any

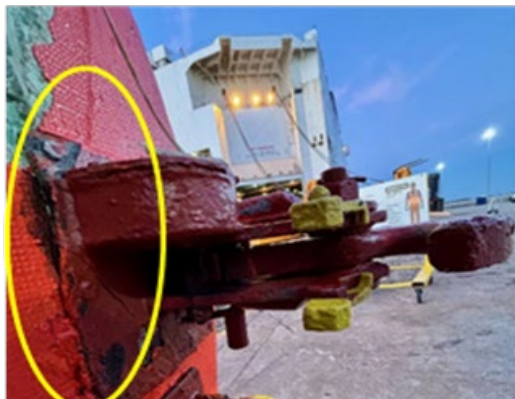


Figure 2: Visible fiberglass delamination and backing plate corrosion at the lifeboat's hook attachment point.



Figure 3: Close up of delamination at the hook attachment point.

compromised or delaminated fiberglass between metal backing plates and hook attachment points.

- Replace components that show signs of excessive wear, corrosion, cracking, deformation, or other damage that may degrade system integrity.
- Implement manufacturer-recommended inspection intervals and focus additional attention on high-stress and load-bearing areas. These areas should be inspected while under load (suspended in the cradle) to identify any areas with compromised structural integrity that could result in failure.

Marine inspectors, port state control officers, investigators, surveyors, and servicing technicians should maintain heightened awareness of these issues and initiate corrective actions as needed. This incident emphasizes the importance of ensuring the proper condition and operation of lifeboats and release mechanisms during re-inspections under Title 46 Code of Federal Regulations, Section 199.45(b). Marine inspectors and port state control officers should confirm compliance with the requirements of SOLAS III/20 – “Operational readiness, maintenance and inspections” when examining ships subject to the SOLAS Convention.

This Safety Alert is provided for informational purposes only and does not relieve any domestic or international safety, operational, or materiel requirement. Developed by Coast Guard Sector Jacksonville and distributed by the Office of Investigations and Casualty Analysis. Questions may be sent to HQS-SMB-CG-INV@uscg.mil.