

Cruise Ship NCOE Recommended Practice



RP-03: Best Practice for Witnessing Abandon Ship Drills on Cruise Ships

Revision Date: April 28, 2023

References:

74 SOLAS 20 III/19.3.4

“Each abandon ship drill shall include:...lowering of at least one lifeboat after any necessary preparation for launching. Each lifeboat shall be launched and maneuvered in the water by its assigned operating crew, at least once every three months during an abandon ship drill.”

COMDTINST 16000.73: Port State Control, Chapter 7 C.2.c.(8)(a)

“During the boat drill, the vessel should lower to the water, release, motor, and recover all lifeboats on the outboard side of the vessel. Inspectors must witness this drill and also witness the crew start lifeboat engines for lifeboats on the inboard side, which cannot be lowered to the water.”

Discussion: Abandon ship drills are required to be observed by PSCOs during Initial, Annual, and Periodic COC exams. In recent years, operators have updated drill procedures to not have assigned crew inside the lifeboats while launching, and/or to not lower all outboard lifeboats during abandon ship drills. PSCOs have had to adjust examination procedures to assess satisfactory completion of abandon ship drills.

Best Practice for Witnessing Abandon Ship Drills: The pre-exam email to the ship should indicate that PSCOs will observe lowering, release, and motoring of all outboard lifeboats and rescue boat during the abandon ship drill. During the drill pre-brief, the PSC team should ensure they understand the ship’s procedures for lowering lifesaving appliances during abandon ship drills, and they should not direct lifeboat lowering in a manner that conflicts with the ship’s drill procedures. For lifeboats not being launched during the drill, the PSCO should observe testing of engines and propellers, and review drill logs and video recordings to verify launching of each lifeboat within the previous three months¹. In cases where only one lifeboat is lowered at a time, PSCOs should verify that launching is being carried out by the crew assigned to that emergency position rather than the same team for all launching appliances. If the lead PSCO perceives that the drill is prolonged due to the ship’s drill procedures, then he/she should assign a team member to observe lowering, release, and motoring while the rest of the team resumes the exam. In the event that not all outboard lifeboats are launched, the PSCO should include a statement in the MISLE activity narrative indicating which of the outboard lifeboats were not launched and why.

¹ 74 SOLAS 20 III/19.3.4.6 specifies that rescue boats other than lifeboats designated as rescue boats shall be launched and maneuvered each month.