

Republic of the Marshall Islands

MARITIME ADMINISTRATOR

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MARINE SAFETY ADVISORY No. 36-20

To: Owners/Operators, Masters, Nautical Inspectors, Recognized Organizations

Subject: SERIOUS INJURIES AND FATALITIES DUE TO FALLS

Date: 3 December 2020

To date during 2020, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) Maritime Administrator (the “Administrator”) has received reports of 40 seafarers who were seriously injured and five who died due to falls on board RMI-flagged vessels. These account for almost 33% of all occupational fatalities and serious injuries¹ reported to the Administrator this year. This is 5% higher than the number of occupational fatalities and serious injuries due to falls that have been reported from 2016 onwards.

Falls from Height:

Falls from height resulted in four of the occupational fatalities. These include three seafarers who fell from vertical and portable ladders while cleaning cargo holds or performing maintenance on deck cranes and a seafarer who fell overboard while adjusting a pilot ladder. These types of falls accounted for 24, or 53%, of all falls that have been reported to the Administrator in 2020. Just under 50% of these falls occurred inside cargo holds.

Causal factors that were identified during the Administrator’s marine safety investigations of these incidents included:

- inadequate pre-task identification and assessment of hazards;
- inadequate supervision;
- non-compliance with the ship manager’s procedures for working from heights or over/near the ship’s side;
- not securing portable ladders or scaffolding while being used;
- not using appropriate personal protective equipment; and
- insufficient or lack of situational awareness.

¹ A serious injury is one that results in a person being incapacitated and unable to function normally for more than 72 hours.

This MSA expires one (1) year after its issuance, unless otherwise noted, extended, superseded, or revoked.

The Administrator has also noted that procedures for working from height do not always include a clear statement about how high above the deck or tank top is considered to be working aloft or from height.

Falls on Stairs and Inclined Ladders:

Although falls on stairs or inclined ladders accounted for just four of the slip and fall related incidents reported to the Administrator in 2020, one of these resulted in an occupational fatality.

Causal factors that were identified during the Administrator's marine safety investigations of these incidents included:

- insufficient or lack of situational awareness;
- lack of vigilance while performing a routine activity;
- not maintaining an adequate grip on the handrail; and
- movement of ship due to heavy weather.

In one instance, poor housekeeping was determined to be a contributing cause.

Same-Level Falls:

There have been 14 same-level falls resulting in serious injuries reported to the Administrator in 2020. Half of those occurred on the main deck. The remainder occurred in the accommodation, bridge, or the engine room. The causal factors of these incidents include those identified for falls on stairs or inclined ladders with the addition of a slippery main deck due to precipitation or sea spray.

Recommendations:

To prevent additional fatalities and serious injuries from falls, including falls overboard, the Administrator recommends that owners and operators review their shipboard safety procedures to determine if this issue is adequately addressed, and if not, revising them as appropriate. Items that should be considered include whether the safety procedures clearly:

- specify a height above a deck or tank top that is considered to be “working aloft or from height”;
- define the meaning of working over or near the side;

- identify shipboard tasks that may require a seafarer to work from height or over the side and the need for the risk assessments for those tasks to identify and address the associated hazards;
- identify practical alternatives for completing routine tasks without a seafarer needing to work from height or over the side;
- articulate the need for all seafarers to remain vigilant and exercise care whenever they move about the ship;
- ensure expectations regarding shipboard compliance with Company established safety procedures are clearly communicated to:
 - senior officers, including in pre-contract briefings; and
 - all seafarers working on board ships in the owner's or operator's fleet;
- provide for a culture where Masters and other senior officers set a positive example for junior officers and ratings by ensuring that safe work practices are followed consistently and that they themselves undertake daily activities in a safe manner; and
- ensure that shore staff can effectively verify shipboard personnel's understanding of and compliance with the safety procedures.

The Administrator also recommends that Masters hold a special safety meeting to review and share the information provided in this Marine Safety Advisory.