

SYNOPSIS



At 1718 UTC, on 6 March 2006, the cook of the LASH vessel *Spruce* sustained serious injuries to his left leg and left pelvis as the result of a fall of 6m from the ship's deck into the empty barge hold. These injuries required several operations, and it was 6 weeks before he was fit enough to be repatriated. It was estimated that it would be an additional 6 months before he would be fit to return to work on board ship.

Spruce was alongside at Victoria Harbour, Hartlepool in the United Kingdom. The vessel had completed the discharge of a full load of barges and was then deballasted to her usual seagoing condition of 4.25m draught even keel.

The incident occurred during the recovery of the vessel's portable gangway shortly before *Spruce* was due to let go her ropes and sail from the port. The injured person was assisting in this operation, although he was not trained for working on deck.

The operation to recover the gangway was labour intensive; five members of crew were used to manhandle the gangway up the side of the vessel to the main deck where the stowage position was located. The vessel was originally fitted with a method of retrieval for a fixed gangway, but this had been cropped and removed a number of years previously.

The minimum numbers of deck and engine personnel required by the vessel's Minimum Safe Manning Certificate (SMC) were insufficient for mooring operations and supplementary tasks. It was necessary for the cook and the steward (who were not included on the SMC) and motormen to assist on deck at times of peak workload.

On *Spruce*, the working regime relied on a system of Inter-Departmental Flexibility, but this had not been accounted for when determining the crew numbers under the SMC or when developing the ship's safety management system. Inter-Departmental Flexibility is a manning concept that is recognised by some individual flag states but which is not defined by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in its Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) Code.

The lessons learned from this accident have resulted in the owners refitting a fixed method of bringing the gangway on board. An additional safety guard rail at the gangway stowage position has also been fitted to prevent anyone falling into the hold. In future, only cooks and stewards who have received additional training for work on deck will be assigned to this type of vessel.

Recommendations have been made jointly to the Marshall Islands Marine Administration, and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) to take forward at IMO an initiative aimed at improving the assessment of levels of minimum safe manning and defining the requirements associated with Inter-Departmental Flexibility.