

SAFETY FLYER TO THE SHIPPING INDUSTRY

Fatal man overboard from the sail training vessel *Pelican of London* at Sharpness, England on 2 October 2023



Pelican of London

Narrative

At 2308¹ on 2 October 2023, the volunteer relief cook of *Pelican of London* fell from the top of the vessel's gangway into the water. Their absence was not noted until the next morning when a search was started. In the early afternoon police divers recovered the relief cook's body to the quay where they were declared deceased.

Pelican of London was alongside in Sharpness, England for maintenance and repair ahead of a planned dry dock period starting on 4 October 2023. The gangway to shore was busy with contractors and crew shuttling back and forth with stores and personal effects. On the evening of 2 October 2023, a small group from the vessel met socially at a local bar. The relief cook drank heavily until closing time and then walked alone back to *Pelican of London*. When at the top of the gangway the relief cook lost their balance and fell through a large gap in the guard ropes, towards the safety net, which failed to arrest their fall, and then into the water between the quay and the vessel. Unable to climb out of the dock the relief cook succumbed rapidly to drowning.

¹ All times are British Summer Time – universal time coordinated +1 hour (UTC+1).

Safety lessons

1. With large gaps in the fencing between the inboard end of the gangway and the bulwark ladder the relief cook was not prevented from falling overboard when they lost their balance as they went to step on board. Chapter 22 of the Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers (COSWP) promulgates guidance on how to rig a gangway such that it provides a safe means of access. Specifically, it states that *guard ropes...should be kept taut at all times* and that, when the inboard end of a gangway rests on the top of the bulwark, *Any gap between the bulwark ladder and the gangway should be adequately fenced to a height of at least 1 metre*. Make sure that appropriate fencing covers the entire length of the gangway, through to any bulwark ladder or steps on board.
2. Secured to the edges of the gangway the safety net had been arranged such that its outer edges were lower than the gangway so it sloped downwards away from the gangway and acted like a chute instead of a means of arresting a fall. Chapter 22 of the COSWP is clear that safety nets must: be mounted where there is a risk of falling; act to *minimise the risk of injury arising from falling*; and, that the *whole length of the means of access should be covered*. The Nautical Institute's 2009 publication Mooring and Anchoring Ships Volume 1, Principles and Practice also provides guidance on the use of spreader bars to ensure that the safety net *can be properly stretched out over the gap between the ship and the quay*. A well-rigged gangway safety net can make all the difference.
3. The Efficient Deck Hand syllabus includes instruction on how to rig a gangway. Use crew with these skills to inspect your gangway to make sure it provides the required *safe means of access...between the ship and the quay*². The gangway in this case did not provide a safe means of access; does yours?

This flyer and the MAIB's investigation report are posted on our website: www.gov.uk/maib

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² Marine Guidance Note 533 (M) Amendment 2: Means of Access, published in 2022.

Extract from The United Kingdom Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2012 – Regulation 5:

"The sole objective of the investigation of an accident under the Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2012 shall be the prevention of future accidents through the ascertainment of its causes and circumstances. It shall not be the purpose of an such investigation to determine liability nor, except so far as is necessary to achieve its objective, to apportion blame."

NOTE

This safety flyer is not written with litigation in mind and, pursuant to Regulation 14(14) of the Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2012, shall be inadmissible in any judicial proceedings whose purpose, or one of whose purposes is to attribute or apportion liability or blame.

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