



Failure or accidental release of the lifeboat hooks can be fatal

The first step to prevent an accidental release of the lifeboat hooks is to identify the potential failure points of the mechanism.

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Lifeboats are designed to save lives, but over the years there have been many serious casualties that have occurred during drills, routine maintenance operations and inspections of davit suspended boats fitted with on-load release hooks. These accidents have also resulted in seafarers losing confidence in the lifeboat launching systems.

Causes of lifeboat accidents

Lifeboat accidents have a variety of causes. Some of the more frequently occurring ones are:

- failure of the on-load release mechanism;
- inadvertent or accidental operation of the on-load release mechanism;
- inadequate maintenance of the lifeboat and its launching equipment. Sometimes the item to be maintained might not be readily accessible due to its location;
- lack of familiarity with lifeboats and the on-load release mechanism;
- unclear operating instructions of the on-load release/resetting mechanism; and
- faulty design.

Recommendations

Broadly speaking the above causes each fall into one of the following three categories: lack of familiarity, procedural inadequacy or faulty design. As for the faulty design, non-compliant hook mechanisms should have been replaced by now, as the deadline for their replacement was 1 July 2019. To address operators' lack of familiarity with the mechanism and procedural inadequacy, more needs to be done. Having a crew that is fully familiar with the lifeboat hook system and the potential failure points would be the starting point. For this the crew should carefully read through the instructions provided in the manufacturer's manual on items such as inspection, maintenance and operation, and if need be, seek clarification directly from the maker. Also, IMO's guidelines on safety during abandon ship drills ([MSC.1/Circ.1578](#)) should be incorporated in the safety management procedures.

Loss prevention poster – [Lifeboat_LowRes.pdf](#)

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