Focus on Safe Access to Vessels

Providing safe access to vessels is important for personal safety

During a vessel’s port stay, many different people such as pilots, agents, inspectors, and tankermen require access to the vessel. It is important that gangway, brow, or ladder access points are strong, stable, clean, and well-lit to avoid potential injuries.

Accidents that occur while accessing a vessel can result in serious injuries and loss of life. Commercial ships in U.S. ports must meet local port and terminal agreements regarding safe access. However, several safety issues have been observed in spite of the agreements. Those issues include:

- Poorly secured and badly positioned gangway netting.
- Loose and unstable handrails.
- Vertical ladders that are not secured or attended at the top and/or bottom.
- Inadequate lighting.
- Oily or slick ladder treads or gangway.
- Makeshift wooden planks for access between side-by-side vessels.

Legal requirements for access during bunker and oil transfer operations

Washington State rules that address the requirements for safe access to vessels are:

- Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 173-180 [Facility Oil Handling Standards]
- WAC 317-40 [Bunkering Operations]

For the full description of these rules, go to the Washington State Legislature website at http://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/.

For regulated oil transfers, WAC 173-180-225 requires Class 1 facilities (refineries, pipelines, or refueling terminals) and Class 3 facilities (small tank farms and terminals that transfer to non-tank vessels with a capacity of 10,500 gallons or more) provide safe access for personnel if the vessel cannot provide the safe access.

WHY IT MATTERS

Personnel injuries and accidents, including loss of life, have occurred because the access to the vessel was unsafe. Understanding what arrangements are safe and acceptable and what is not can prevent future accidents.

Contact information:

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Document Approval:

Department of Ecology requested and received approval from West of England Insurance Services and the International Maritime Pilots’ Association to use the diagrams on pages two and four (via email on 3/12/09).

Special accommodations:

• Access must be secured at both top and the bottom to prevent movement of the access platform.

• The entire ladder and where it is accessed from the vessel and facility must be well lit during low light or low visibility conditions.

For **bunkering operations**, WAC 317-40-050 requires a receiving vessel to have an accommodation ladder between the vessel and facility or to another vessel. If the ladder is inaccessible, another means of access that meets the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), such as a Pilot’s ladder, can be used instead. If the vessel master determines access is not safe due to weather or seastate, the master may allow communication either visually, by voice, sound-powered phones, radio, or air horn as required under 33 C.F.R. Sec. 155.785. The International Maritime Organization’s “**Required Arrangements for Pilots**” diagram is included on page 4.

**Example of PROPER ACCESS to a vessel**

The following recommendations and illustration are provided by the West of England P&I Club.

1. Rope guardrails tight.
2. Stanchions free of distortion and all in place.
3. Safety net positioned between ladder and ship.
4. Hoisting arrangements clear of head height.
5. Steps free of oil, grease and ice.
6. Bottom platform level (where fitted).
7. Lighting arrangements positioned effectively.
8. Base clear of obstructions.
9. Lifebuoy with light/line with float available.

**Safety Management System (SMS)**

The use, care and regular maintenance of access systems require a high level of attention to ensure safe operation. Therefore, these processes should be incorporated into a vessel operator’s Safety Management System (SMS) or a facility’s operations manual or standard operating procedures.
Examples of **UNSAFE** vessel access

This is a 10-meter [nearly vertical] climb and the ladder is not safely secured at the top or bottom.

It is impossible to safely secure the upper ladder to the short platform ladder - it is not safe access.

Laying down wooden planks to span the open gap between the gangway and the deck does not ensure safe access.

The net needs to be pulled out under the gangway to prevent a fall.

More information is available at:

Occupational Safety & Health Administration - Access to Vessels


Accidents related to gangway and ramp failures

REQUIRED BOARDING ARRANGEMENTS FOR PILOT

In accordance with I.M.O. requirements and I.M.P.A. recommendations

INTERNATIONAL MARITIME PILOTS’ ASSOCIATION

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