

Fatal fall from ladder

The chief officer inspected the cargo tanks before loading started and did not find any problems. The vessel had an uneventful sea passage and arrived at the discharge port. The discharge took about 3 days. After the discharge was completed the Bosun and an AB cleaned the hatch coaming for one of the hatch covers. After they were done the Bosun stood by for the hatch cover to be closed.

Meanwhile two stevedores were in the cargo hold finishing their job. This was in the morning and they had started their shift the previous evening. They had worked for more than 12 hours. When they were leaving they had to first climb up a vertical ladder, then ascend a spiral staircase and for the last 2.5 meters climb up another vertical ladder to get out of the cargo hold.

The stevedores had brought a thermos and tea cup each. The cup did not fit in the first stevedore's boiler suit pocket so he held it in his hand instead. This wasn't a problem when he ascended the spiral staircase. However, when he reached the last platform there was still the vertical ladder to climb up.

Climbing up the last ladder he only used one hand as he had the tea cup in the other. He was not wearing a safety harness. When he was almost at the top he slipped and fell down.

Unfortunately, he did not hit the platform below but fell more than 20m and landed at the bottom of the cargo hold.

The other stevedore shouted for help which the bosun heard. He could see the stevedore lying at the bottom of the cargo hold and instantly called the chief officer on the radio and told him about the accident. The chief officer assembled a rescue team



with a stretcher and gave the stevedore first aid. An ambulance arrived shortly afterwards and he was lifted out of the cargo hold by a crane. Unfortunately, he was declared dead at the hospital.

It was later found that a steel bar was missing from one of the lower railings at the beginning of the spiral ladder. The railing was most likely damaged during the loading by one of the crane grabs, or an excavator as it was covered by the cargo when it arrived at the discharge port. ■

Discussion

Go to the "File" menu and select "Save as..." to save the pdf-file on your computer.

You can place the marker below each question to write the answer directly into the file.



When discussing this case please consider that the actions taken at the time made sense for all involved. Do not only judge, but also ask why you think these actions were taken and could this happen on your vessel?

1. What were the immediate causes of this accident?

2. Is there a risk that this kind of accident could happen on our vessel?

3. What could you have done to prevent this accident?

4. When working at height is it a requirement to wear a safety harness?

5. Are we required to wear a safety harness when climbing in and out of cargo holds?

6. What are the risks when entering or leaving a cargo hold from a vertical ladder?

7. Do we train our crew how to climb a ladder and explain the consequences of falling?

8. What are our procedures if we see a stevedore doing anything unsafe onboard?

9. How do we ensure that stevedores and contractors follow the required safety practices?

10. Do we have a tool box meeting with the stevedores' supervisor when arriving in port?

11. If not, could this be useful?

12. Do we require that contractors and stevedores wear a safety harness?

13. Do you think fatigue played a part in this accident?

14. What sections of our SMS would have been breached if any?

15. Does our SMS address these risks?

16. How could we improve our SMS to address these issues?

17. What do you think was the cause of this accident?

18. Is there any kind of training that we could do that addresses these issues?

Issues to consider



- Should we require the crew to monitor every person onboard? Of course not, but it would be beneficial to have a tool box meeting with the stevedores' supervisor to explain what is required of the stevedores when working onboard.
- It is understood that many ports require that stevedores wear a safety harness when climbing the cargo ladder. It is important that the chief officer emphasizes the importance of complying with this requirement.
- After both loading and discharging, the chief officer should inspect the ladders to ensure they have not been damaged during the cargo operation.
- This accident highlights the consequences and actual minimal effort it takes to do a job safely.