

Lessons learned case 3 – Stowaways in the steering gear trunk

Please discuss the following key learning points with your group:

- It is extremely unlikely that a person would be able to sit on the rudder and not be washed out of the rudder trunk during a sea passage. If people in the rudder trunk are not found before departure or shortly after departure, they will most likely be lost at sea.
- To prevent stowaways from achieving access, please consider the following if the vessel is in a port with a high risk of stowaways,
 - If the rudder is above the waterline, using the rescue boat, inspect the rudder and if possible, the rudder trunk before departure.
 - Install protective grating or steel bars onto the steering gear trunk to prevent access from the rudder.

Avoid embarkation of a stowaway:

- Members of the crew, or reliable external guards, should be posted at the gangway and on RoRo vessels at each open ramp. Access points to the vessel should generally be kept to a minimum.
- Stevedores and other people who are authorised visitors on the vessel should carry identification cards or tags which they should wear to be easily visible. Records should be kept of people boarding and disembarking the vessel.
- Mooring lines, the outboard side of the vessel, and containers, whether sealed or empty, are common access points. To eliminate such possibilities, security must be tightened in the cargo handling routines, and the deck area should be patrolled regularly. Make sure that proper deck lighting is maintained during the night.
- The crew should be encouraged to report anything that looks suspicious.
- All doors and entrances to the accommodation, stores and similar should be kept locked in port.
- A search of the vessel, including the cargo holds, should be made before departure. Stowaways are often unaware of the hazards on board a vessel. They may hide in places which would seem highly unsuitable such as reefer holds, rudder trunks, ventilation fan shafts, funnels, and cargo tanks. Such areas should not be overlooked when the vessel is searched.



If a stowaway is detected on board:

- Search the vessel for more stowaways. If one has been able to sneak on board undetected, others may have been able to do the same.
- Search the stowaway and the surroundings where the stowaway was found for documents or other belongings which could confirm or give a clue as to his/her identity. Documents found should be kept by the Master in a safe place.
- The stowaway should be questioned in order to verify his/her identity in preparation for repatriation. A suggested questionnaire can be found using the link below. These details, including particulars of any documents found that confirm the stowaway's identity should be forwarded immediately to the owner's head office and the ship agent in the next ports of call.
- While the stowaway remains on board, the immigration authorities in all ports of call should be informed of his/her presence and their status as a stowaway. Failure to inform the authorities properly can result in fines against the vessel.
- The Club advises strongly against signing on the stowaway as a crew member. The vessel may have fines imposed if the authorities discover the true status of the stowaway. By temporarily upgrading a stowaway to a crew member, the shipowner may also assume much wider liabilities in case of injury, illness, or death.
- The stowaway must be treated humanely. Adequate living conditions, such as meals, accommodation, medical attention, and sanitary facilities, should be provided until the stowaway can be disembarked.