Gibraltar Maritime Administration
HM Government of Gibraltar

Watergate House
2/8 Casemates Square
Gibraltar

Tel (+350)200 46862 / 200 47771 /200 50424
Fax (+350) 200 47770
e-mail: maritime.survey@gibraltar.gov.gi
maritime.registry@gibraltar.gov.gi

Shipping Guidance Notice – 159

Safe Means of Access for Small Vessels

For the attention: Owners, Operators, Master's, Certifying Authorities and Recognised Organisations

1. Introduction

1.1. The purpose of this Shipping Guidance Notice (SGN) is to bring to the attention of owners, operators, and crew of small vessels the importance of safe means of access to and from the vessel.

1.2. Poor access, including poor lighting, can cause serious and occasionally fatal incidents involving crew members and other persons boarding or leaving small vessels, whether alongside a quay, jetty, afloat at a mooring, on a slipway, or in a dry dock.

2. Responsibility

2.1. The primary responsibility for ensuring safe access to any vessel, large or small, rests with the person providing the means of access. This would be the owner and or skipper of the vessel when the means of access, e.g. a gangway, forms part of the vessel's equipment. Reasonable steps should be taken to ensure the health and safety of workers and others on vessels. Providing a safe means of access to the vessel is considered to be an integral part of that responsibility. Furthermore, the duty to ensure that the equipment provided is properly used is placed on any person "in control of the matter", which will include the master.

2.2. Alternatively, primary responsibility could rest with the operator of a dock, a dry dock, jetty, harbour, pontoon or mooring if the means of access is provided by that shore facility, e.g. a gangway or ladder provided by a harbour, or dock operator, or dry dock operator.

2.3. There can be situations in which there is dual responsibility e.g. when alongside a high dock wall and the vessel has to provide a means to get to a ladder on the dock wall.

2.4. This should not be seen as a hard and fast demarcation of responsibility. Ensuring safe access is a concern for everyone who requires access to a vessel.

2.5. There are many factors which influence the decisions when selecting a safe means of access. Section 3 & 4 of this document provide some guidance in this respect.

2.6. Seafarers and other workers requiring access to vessels also have their part to play in minimising the risks to themselves. This includes avoiding alcohol, taking a torch, and especially, not taking a leap in the dark.

3. **Risk Assessment**

3.1. Risk assessments should be carried out and reviewed regularly (and immediately after any incident). The person responsible for providing safe means of access should, carry out a risk assessment to:

- consider the health and safety of all seafarers and other workers requiring access to and from the vessel arising in the normal course of their duties or activities;
- identify any potential hazards; and
- implement appropriate safety precautions to mitigate the risk to an acceptable level. Failure to do so could result in potentially dangerous situations occurring.

3.2. The risk assessment should also consider the health and safety of all seafarers and other workers requiring access in all circumstances, including bad weather, darkness, and when returning to the vessel after recreational activities ashore, when possibly under the influence of alcohol or drugs and with a reduced ability to recognise risks.

4. **Recommended hierarchy of means of access**

4.1. Each of the methods listed below for gaining access to small vessels can be undertaken safely, providing appropriate safety measures are taken.

4.2. The recommended hierarchy of means of access for small vessels starting with the safest, is outlined as follows:

- gangway from between a vessel and a quay, quay steps, quay wall or pier;
- stepping directly (short step, level access) between a vessel, and a quay, quay steps, quay wall, pier or pontoon;
- fixed ladder from a quay, quay wall, pier or jetty;
- portable ladder between a vessel and a quay, quay wall, pier or jetty.

4.3. In all cases, the provision of a lifebuoy with appropriate length of line attached and immediately available at all crossing points should be considered.

4.4. <u>Gangway from another vessel, a quay, wall or pier or another vessel.</u>

4.4.1. This is the safest method of access, but checks should be made to ensure that: (a) Mooring lines are not allowed to go slack; (b) the gangway is properly secured; (c) stanchions are not allowed to become loose; (d) side ropes and/or guard rails are replaced if worn or damaged; and (e) the gangway and its surface are in good order.

4.4.2. The gangway should be fenced on both sides along its entire length with both upper and intermediate guard rails. A safety net should be provided beneath gangways.

4.4.3. If suspension ropes on suspended gangways become slack, the gangway may move or fall. Gangways in this condition must not be used until they are repaired/adjusted.

4.4.4. A gangway that rests on a quay on rollers or wheels should be positioned in such a way that the rollers or wheels are on a reasonably level surface and free from obstruction.

4.4.5. Users should be made aware that gangways are prone to adverse movement, which may lead to additional hazards.

4.4.6. Each end of the gangway should provide safe access to a safe place.

4.5. Stepping directly, short step and level access between a small vessel and a quay, quay steps, quay wall pier on pontoon.

4.5.1. This is acceptable provided vessels are securely moored so that any gap between them is minimal and users can step across without needing to jump. Small vessel owners should take measures to:

- minimise surge, sway and yaw movement as this can cause large gaps between the quay and the vessel or between vessels;
- prevent crossing where the vessels taper and a gap is formed;
- consider provision of guardrail gates to discourage climbing of rails;
- provide gangways or other means of safe access between the vessels where tapered crossing is unavoidable;
- where practicable avoid:
- restricted space around the access point due to deck shelters or gear;
- mooring vessels with rounded deck shelter tops adjacent to one another where there is a need to cross from shelter to shelter and it leaves large gaps;
- situations where access is only possible: a) through deck shelter spaces that are badly lit; or b) where any movement of the vessel would restrict access.

4.5.2. For further information the Code of Safe Working Practices (COSWP), Chapter 26.7 on safe mooring for domestic passenger craft and ship's launches from quays and 26.8 self-mooring operations, provides industry best practice and guidance.

4.5.3. Where access between small vessels is necessary, it should generally be provided by the vessel lying outboard. However, where there is a great disparity in freeboard, means of access should be provided by the vessel with the higher freeboard.

4.6. Fixed ladders from a quay, quay wall, pier or jetty.

4.6.1. This is a common method of access when the vessel is tied up to a quay in tidal waters. There have been accidents involving fixed quay ladders (e.g. MAIB fatal accident report Osprey 2002) and while there is evidence that these ladders are not well suited for regular use as a means of access to vessels, these are generally considered safe. However, there is potential to make further sensible reductions in risk to ladder users, subject to a local assessment and timetabling. Users should check that the ladder to ensure that it is good condition prior to use.

4.6.2. Vessels on moorings.

4.6.3. Fixed ladders from a quay, quay wall, pier or jetty are acceptable where the vessel being boarded has a fixed boarding ladder and the tender being used can be properly tied up to the vessel to prevent more than slight movement whilst the transfer takes place.

4.7. Vessels on a slipway or in dry dock

4.7.1. Good quality staging or scaffolding, properly installed by competent and trained personnel and fitted with safe means of access, should be used for maintenance work and inspection.

4.8. Portable Ladders

4.8.1. Portable ladders should only be used where other equipment offering a higher level of fall protection (according to the hierarchy of means of access) is not available or an existing quay feature prevents its use and cannot be altered.

4.8.2. Portable ladders should only used as a means of access, where following the risk assessment, their use is low risk to the seafarer and a short duration task.

4.8.3. Any ladder used for quayside access should be fit for purpose and inspected prior to use by the operator of the fishing vessel or small vessel.

4.8.4. If there is any risk of movement the portable ladder should be secured before use.

5. **Action to take**

5.1. Wherever possible, the person responsible for the provision of the access should deal with hazards in a way that removes them completely. Where this is impossible, measures must be taken to minimise the risk by such means as the provision of:

- additional ladders;
- suitable securing points;
- handholds;
- the provision of strong and secure scaffolding or staging; and
- alternative means of access, such as a tender.

5.2. If risk assessment identifies significant risk from the boarding arrangement in any particular circumstances, consideration should be given to posting a member of the crew to monitor that those leaving and returning to the vessel do so safely.

5.3. Any problems that are encountered with docks, quays etc should be reported to the Harbour Master, Port Authority, or Operator.

6. **What may happen if safe access is not provided**

6.1. Where no safe means of access is available to a vessel, the consequences for the vessel owner, skipper, or local authority could be severe. For instance:

6.1.1. If an accident has occurred because there was no safe means of access detention or enforcement action may be taken by local authorities. Additionally, there could be the possibility of legal civil action from the injured party, or the next of kin, where death has resulted.

6.1.2. Enforcement action could be taken, resulting in: issue of Prohibition or Improvement Notice, conviction leading to a fine, or in particularly serious cases imprisonment.

6.1.3. In serious cases the vessel may be detained until a proper means of access is provided. This could result in loss of earnings as the vessel would be prevented from leaving port/berth.

6.1.4. A Surveyor attending to carry out a pre-arranged survey may decline to use the means of access because it is unsafe, delaying completion of the survey.

6.2. Seafarers or other workers who find there is no safe access to board the vessel, should not compromise their own safety by attempting to board using substandard or unsafe access.

Steve Gomez
Chief Surveyor

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