

Man overboard fatality

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The US Coast Guard (USCG) has published [Safety Alert 05-19](#) relating to a man overboard fatality.

What happened?

The incident occurred when a very large (330m) container ship arrived in port in heavy weather (40 knot winds and 4m swell.)

The vessel was on a WNW course with seas on the vessel's starboard quarter, manoeuvring at about 10 knots to make a lee in preparation to embark a ship's pilot at a port side hatch.

Two crewmen were preparing for the pilot's arrival, behind the hydraulically operated bi-fold hatch door. This was located forward of the bridge and approximately 4 m above the waterline – see photographs.

As the vessel manoeuvred, it was hit by heavy seas that forced the hatch door open, resulting in flooding of the embarkation space, sweeping one crewman out to sea and injuring another.

The crewman who was washed overboard and subsequently swept out to sea was lost and presumed dead after 28 hours of searching by the local Coast Guard.

The injured crewman suffered a broken leg when the pilot ladder fell on him. The hatch door itself was damaged.

IOGP Life Saving Rules:



Bypassing safety controls



Work authorisation



Outside view of door.

What went wrong? What was the cause?

- The two crewmen were unable to see the sea from their position behind the hatch door. As they opened the door, seas unexpectedly struck and violently forced it open, flooding the space.
- One of them was not wearing a harness or safety line, nor a personal flotation device and was washed overboard and subsequently swept out to sea.

The USCG reiterates the need to take the greatest care with personnel transfer at sea, especially in heavy weather conditions.

Even though the side hatch door was located on the port side and was being brought onto the vessel's lee, the crew's inability to observe and assess the sea conditions combined with the ship's roll and sea state presented significant risks.

Recommended actions

The USCG reiterates the need to take the greatest care with personnel transfer at sea, especially in heavy weather conditions. Even though the side hatch door was located on the port side and was being brought onto the vessel's lee, the crew's inability to observe and assess the sea conditions combined with the ship's roll and sea state presented significant risks.

The US Coast Guard strongly recommends the following actions:

- A thorough review and update of vessel Safety Management Systems (SMS), procedural manuals and guidance that relates to pilot transfers.
- Reinforce the importance of wearing personal protection devices and safety lines when working over the side of a vessel, when exposed to the elements or when there is an absence of barrier that could prevent an accidental water entry.
- Ensure officers and crew identify potential hazards and conduct a risk assessment, to include a consideration of weather conditions, prior to opening hatch doors of this sort.
- Ensure crew communications between navigation watch officers and crew, in situations such as this, are clear and provide suitable supervision of activities, considering sea state and other changing conditions. Members may wish to search the [Safety Flash Archive](#) for terms such as *pilot* or *man overboard*.

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