

LTI: serious injury to thumb when pipe fell during maintenance

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A 2nd engineer on a vessel suffered a serious injury to the left thumb whilst dismantling a grey water pipe.

What happened?

The 2nd engineer and 3rd engineer began dismantling the vertical section of the grey water pipe in the engine room; they first removed bolts from both flanges (top & bottom) and left two bolts of top flange in loose position to keep the pipe in position. Whilst removing the lower U-clamp, the pipe unexpectedly fell about 1.4m. The weight of the pipe was about 25 kg. The left thumb of the 2nd engineer was caught between the falling pipe and the supporting U-clamp's plate. This accident resulted in a partial amputation of the thumb.

IOGP Life Saving Rules:



Bypassing safety controls



Safe mechanical lifting



Line of fire



A daily pre-job and toolbox meeting were carried out with all people involved. The maintenance of the grey water pipe was discussed and there was a corresponding Permit to Work and risk assessment issued.

What could have gone better?

- The vertical section of the pipe was secured using only two loose bolts on the upper flange – had it been better secured, it might not have fallen.
- The 2nd Engineer used his left hand to maintain his balance while slackening the U-clamps. In doing so, his hand was placed in the line of fire – something that ideally would either be obvious – or impossible to do.
- A secondary arrangement to secure the pipe could have saved the day – and the thumb.

- A culture of curiosity and questioning might have meant that one of the two engineers said, “Hold on a minute – we’re doing this unsafely! Let’s STOP the job and rereg it.”

Lessons

- Arrange primary and secondary securing when dismantling suspended loads.
- Create a workplace culture where junior staff – ANY staff – can speak up and challenge unsafe practices.

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