

All of a sudden – “this is not a drill” – person injured during a drill

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The Marine Safety Forum (MSF) has published [Safety Alert 21-12](#) relating to a person who was injured as a result of being suspended in a safety harness during a rescue at height drill.

What happened?

For the purpose of a rescue at height drill a person on the main deck suspended himself 1.5 metres from the deck in a safety harness with a ladder nearby, while crew gathered on the bridge.

After contacting crew on the bridge by radio the person in the safety harness stepped on the ladder for a second time to reposition the safety harness. After this the person pretended to fall off the ladder to make it look like a real situation for rescue.

A fall arrestor was used for lifting the person to disconnect him from the sling he was hanging on. Whilst being lifted, the person lost consciousness. At this time the crew members on deck were not sure if the situation was real, or ‘played’ as a scene for the drill?

However, once lowered to the deck the crew discovered blood coming from his mouth and realised the situation was for real! First aid was given. Further medical treatment was immediately carried out including medical oxygen, and the Automated External Defibrillator (AED) was connected for heart monitoring.

The authorities and the office Emergency Response Team were informed immediately, and a nearby sister company vessel assisted. The casualty was medevaced by helicopter to hospital, shortly after regaining consciousness. After numerous scans and tests the person was discharged from hospital within two days to recover at home and more tests to be conducted, as no clear diagnosis could be determined at this time.

Amongst the conclusions was that the immediate first aid response by the vessel crew significantly reduced the impact on the person. Severely emotionally shaken by the experience, the crew looks back on an incident that obviously could have resulted in a very different / less favourable outcome. Due to prudent action by the crew this was fortunately prevented.

What went wrong?

When suspended in the harness, the straps around the legs and limbs may have obstructed the blood flow, as indicated in the graphics on the following page, which is commonly known as suspension trauma.

Actions

- Performing drills and exercises to a realistic scenario is of course essential to ensure crew can act promptly and effectively in emergency situations. **However, the risks of such exercise should always be carefully assessed.**
- The risk of trauma from being suspended in a harness can be effectively reduced by using suspension trauma relief straps after falling into the harness, this places the weight of the body on the feet while awaiting rescue.
- Consider also the reverse scenario: what happens if someone falls overboard during a Man Overboard Drill, or if a real fire breaks out during a fire drill?

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