

21
February
2023

WSH ALERT

FATAL ACCIDENT

Harbour pilot dies after falling overboard

On 11 February 2023 at about 3 am, a harbour pilot was crossing over from a tugboat to a launch boat when he fell overboard. His body was recovered by rescue divers later the same morning.

Preliminary investigations revealed that the pilot was wearing a life jacket and the sea was choppy at the time of the accident.



Figure 1: Photo of the tugboat from which the pilot fell overboard.



Figure 2: Photo of the launch boat the pilot tried to board.

Transfers between vessels at sea expose workers to the risk of falling into water. Another accident where a [worker fell into the sea while boarding a service boat](#) occurred on 17 May 2022. The WSH Council calls on all maritime stakeholders performing similar activities to undertake an urgent assessment of their safety measures.

What companies should do

Companies should urgently assess and ensure that their WSH management system includes the following measures or checks:

- **Safe transfer conditions:** Do not proceed with vessel transfer if there are unfavourable weather or sea conditions, extensive vessel or boat movement, if anyone feels unwell, or if it feels unsafe to proceed. For safe boat-to-boat transfer at sea, it is ideal for both boats to be stationary and alongside each other. If stopping is not practical, both boats should be as slow as practicable and kept at the same speed.
- **Safe vessel transfer:** Establish and implement safe work procedures for transfer between vessels. Identify suitable transfer point(s) and allow transfers only at the designated point(s). Provide secure handholds and/ or footholds at each transfer point. Keep transfer points free of trip hazards and well-lit at night. Board only when the boat-to-boat transfer points are level with each other and under the direction of the launch master.
- **Transfer supervision:** Deploy workers on both boats to supervise and assist with the transfer, and to activate emergency response and rescue procedures if required.
- **Worker competency:** All personnel making vessel transfers should be trained on the safe work procedure for transfer.
- **Right to decline boarding:** Advise workers to stay alert and exercise caution during vessel transfer. Respect the right of workers to say no if the conditions for boarding are unfavourable.
- **Emergency response:** Equip each boat with life-saving equipment (e.g. life buoy with rope) for use in the event of a man-over-board situation. If a worker falls into the water, there must be a life buoy which he can hold on to so that his head stays above the water until he is rescued.
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** Provide workers with the necessary PPE (e.g. life jacket, safety boots, gloves, and safety helmet with chin strap) for transferring between vessels. The life jacket should be a working SOLAS-type approved life jacket or a life jacket meeting ISO 12402 Personal Flotation Device with a performance level 100 or higher. Place all life jackets on a regular inspection and maintenance programme to check their integrity and proper function so that they will work as intended during an emergency.

For more information, refer to the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore's [Guidelines for Safe Transfer of Persons between Vessels at Anchorages](#); the [WSH \(General Provisions\) Regulations](#); and the WSH Council's [Guide to WSH for Service Providers on Safe Working on Ships at Anchorages](#), [Video on Safe Boarding of Vessel](#) and [Case Studies for Working In and Around Water](#).

Under the WSH Act, first-time corporate offenders may be sentenced to the maximum fine of \$500,000 whilst individuals can either be sentenced to the maximum fine of \$200,000 and/or an imprisonment not exceeding 2 years. Read more on the [WSH Act penalties](#).

During the extended Heightened Safety Period (1 September 2022 to 31 May 2023), the Ministry of Manpower will impose severe actions for serious WSH lapses, which include:

- Debarment from hiring new work pass holders
- Company leaders to personally account to MOM and take responsibility for rectifications, and attend a mandatory half-day in-person WSH training course.
- Engaging external auditors to conduct a thorough review of company's WSH processes

* Information on the accident is based on preliminary investigations by the Ministry of Manpower as at 14 February 2023. This may be subject to change as investigations are still on-going. Please also note that the recommendations provided here are not exhaustive and they are meant to enhance workplace safety and health so that a recurrence may be prevented. The information and recommendations provided are not to be construed as implying liability on any party nor should it be taken to encapsulate all the responsibilities and obligations under the law.

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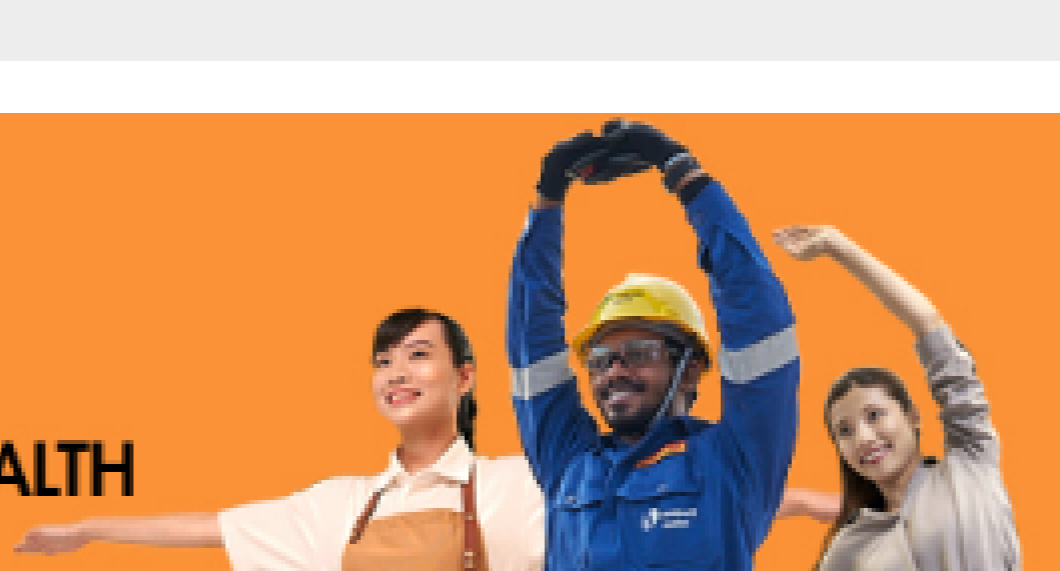
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