



# Bundesstelle für Seeunfalluntersuchung

## Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation

Federal Higher Authority subordinated to  
the Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure

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### **PRESS RELEASE No. 19/20**

The Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation (BSU) hereby announces the publication of the Investigation Report No. 19/19 on 17 December 2020. The report deals with the fall of a canal helmsman embarking on the multi-purpose vessel resulting in serious injuries and is available for download at

<https://www.bsu-bund.de/EN/News>

#### **Less Serious Marine Casualty**

Early morning on 13 January 2019, the Dutch-flagged multi-purpose vessel MARFAAM was sailing westbound on the NOK level of the Rusterbergen pilot transfer station, where the canal helmsman and the pilot were to be transferred.

The lowered pilot ladder was illuminated and the overall impression of the pilot embarkation point from on board the pilot vessel was apparently good.

The canal helmsman was the first to climb the pilot ladder. He was unable to find a handhold when he was level with the main deck at the gateway and fell from a height of 3 – 4 m first upon the rails and from there head first upon the deck of the pilot vessel. The transfer manoeuvre was immediately aborted and the pilot on board the pilot vessel administered first aid. The emergency services were alerted and the pilot vessel sailed to the pilot station.

The pilot and the canal helmsman from the eastern section stayed on board the MARFAAM and sailed on to Brunsbüttel.

The canal helmsman suffered life-threatening injuries. Despite a basilar skull fracture, rib fractures, lung contusions, rupture of the spleen and further injuries, he was fit for work again after several months.

In the wake of this accident, the BSU became aware of two similar incidents involving the MARFAAM during the transfer of personnel at the Rusterbergen pilot transfer station prior to mid-March 2019. They both occurred in December 2018. The two cases also involved pilots being unable to find a handhold while crossing from the pilot ladder to the main deck via the gateway. However, for various reasons these individuals escaped with nothing more than just a fright and were able to reach the main deck physically unharmed.

The lack of – internationally binding – adequate handholds at the MARFAAM's gateway was the reason for the accident involving the canal helmsman and the two pilots nearly falling from a height. In particular, both this and the other accidents that have come to light were caused by the fact that

- lacking handholds were not identified but the pilot embarkation point certified as appropriate by the classification society;
- this situation was not identified subsequently during a port State control inspection;
- neither pilots nor canal helmsmen rated this deficiency as a threat and therefore failed to report it to a vessel traffic service (VTS) for specific scrutiny during a port State control inspection.

From the BSU's perspective, adequate handholds have now been installed on the MARFAAM to eliminate the primary cause of the accident.

The investigation revealed many other hazards of a fundamental nature associated with the use of pilot embarkation points, which can be reduced if the safety recommendations are observed. In particular, they include an

- absence of occupational health and safety standards for canal helmsmen and pilots and unclear responsibilities, respectively.
- absence of specific international requirements for the adequacy of handholds at pilot embarkation points with a gateway;
- absence of a culture of reporting dangerous pilot embarkation points to VTSs, and
- absence of sufficient implementation and enforcement of existing internationally binding rules for pilot transfer arrangements.

Further aspects and details can be found in the investigation report.

All investigation reports, safety recommendations and other information published by the BSU are available at

<https://www.bsu-bund.de/EN/Publications>.

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Director