

Falls from a pilot ladder

Less serious casualty: Three people fell from a ship's pilot ladder on different days at the pilot transfer station on the Kiel Canal in Germany.

What happened?

Three people (pilots/canal helmsmen) lost their footing and fell back onto the pilot boat, which was still sailing alongside, on different days while climbing from a pilot ladder through a gateway of a rail onto the deck of a multi-purpose vessel. One person suffered life-threatening injuries in the process. The other two escaped with nothing more than a fright.

Why did it happen?

- The gateway lacked the internationally prescribed adequate handholds. Instead, the pipe forming part of the railing had been drawn downwards. It was not possible to grasp this pipe safely because of its large diameter.
- The classification society failed to identify this shortcoming and certified the embarkation point as appropriate.
- This situation was not identified during Port State Control inspections.
- Pilots and canal helmsmen had not identified the existing hazard during previous pilotage assignments or had not reported the shortcoming to the competent authorities in Germany so as to have the actual situation assessed during a Port State Control inspection.

What can we learn from this?

- All users of a pilot embarkation point should know the internationally binding minimum requirements.
- Embarkation points should only be used if they appear to meet international requirements.
- Apparent shortcomings should be reported to a competent national authority so that the situation can be examined and shortcomings eliminated during a Port State Control inspection.

Who can implement/observe it?

Pilots and any other person who uses a pilot ladder. Port State Control inspectors, classification societies, shipyards and shipowners.