

These flashes summarise key safety matters and incidents, allowing wider dissemination of lessons learned from them. The information below has been provided in good faith by members and should be reviewed individually by recipients, who will determine its relevance to their own operations.

The effectiveness of the IMCA safety flash system depends on receiving reports from members in order to pass on information and avoid repeat incidents. Please consider adding the IMCA secretariat (imca@imca-int.com) to your internal distribution list for safety alerts and/or manually submitting information on specific incidents you consider may be relevant. All information will be anonymised or sanitised, as appropriate.

A number of other organisations issue safety flashes and similar documents which may be of interest to IMCA members. Where these are particularly relevant, these may be summarised or highlighted here. Links to known relevant websites are provided at www.imca-int.com/links. Additional links should be submitted to webmaster@imca-int.com

This safety notice is concerned with safety matters concerned with lifeboats.

1 Video – Lifeboat On-Load Release Gear

A video has recently been produced by the UK's Health & Safety Executive (HSE) entitled 'Lifeboat On-load Release Gear – Safe Inspection and Maintenance'.

Four lives have been lost over the last three years in the North Sea, in accidents associated with lifeboat on-load release gear. Investigations have shown that these accidents were occurring during or directly after inspection or maintenance.

The common element appears to be human error, not mechanical failure which raises concerns about the training and experience necessary to perform such work safely.

HSE has produced this video to act as a 'refresher' for anyone who has to inspect and maintain lifeboats. Featuring Mills 'Titan' twin falls gear, the video looks at the basic principles of safe inspection and maintenance and how various operations can be undertaken.

This video is available from HSE Video Dept. -tel: 44 845 741 9411 priced £126.67

2 Lifeboat Safety Guidelines

The E&P Forum has also produced Lifeboat Safety Guidelines – these guidelines are intended for offshore operators and contractors – and address lifeboat operational and maintenance aspects – with emphasis on preventing unwanted launches – pertaining to fixed and floating installations and mobile offshore accommodation and drilling units.

This E&P Forum report states that there has been a history of incidents associated with the release mechanism maintenance.

These guidelines are available from E&P Forum – tel: 44 171 292 0600, fax 44 171 434 3721 priced £12.00

3 Lifeboat Brake Release Failure

During the lowering of a Watercraft lifeboat to the sea for planned annual maintenance and test run, the brake release cable became snarled on its reel. The end of the brake cable was pulled through the top of the boat and was therefore not available for the coxswain to continue the descent, leaving the lifeboat approximately 2 metres from the water level.

The brake release cable is believed to have been rove onto the drum in manner whereby the turns of the cable have become tangled, this is suspected to have occurred during a previous falls rope change out.

The following recommendations were made as a result of this incident:

- ◆ Procedures for rope change out and brake release function should be reviewed to ensure that brake drum cables are correctly positioned on the reels when returned to the falls position;
- ◆ All procedures involving winches should be reviewed to address the issue of 'reeling in'.

4 Lifeboat Incident as a Result of a Suspension Chain Failure

A serious incident occurred during a routine lifeboat operational test, involving the lowering of a vessel lifeboat into the water. A three-man crew boarded the lifeboat, strapped themselves in, and prepared to lower the boat to the embarkation deck using the remote break release wire from within the boat. Just after the davits reached the end of their travel and the boat started to descend, a loud noise was heard and the aft end of the lifeboat broke away from the hook. Shortly afterwards the forward hook broke away from the boat and the lifeboat fell into the water.

The cause of the lifeboat falling was the breaking of the aft hook suspension chain. The action transferred the whole weight of the lifeboat onto the forward hook, which pulled out of the GRP deck under the excess load. The exact cause of the suspension chain failure could not be established but the most probable mode of failure was brittle failure exacerbated by corrosion pitting.

The recommendations arising from the incident included ensuring that suspension links and chain are suitably heat-treated for use in a marine environment.