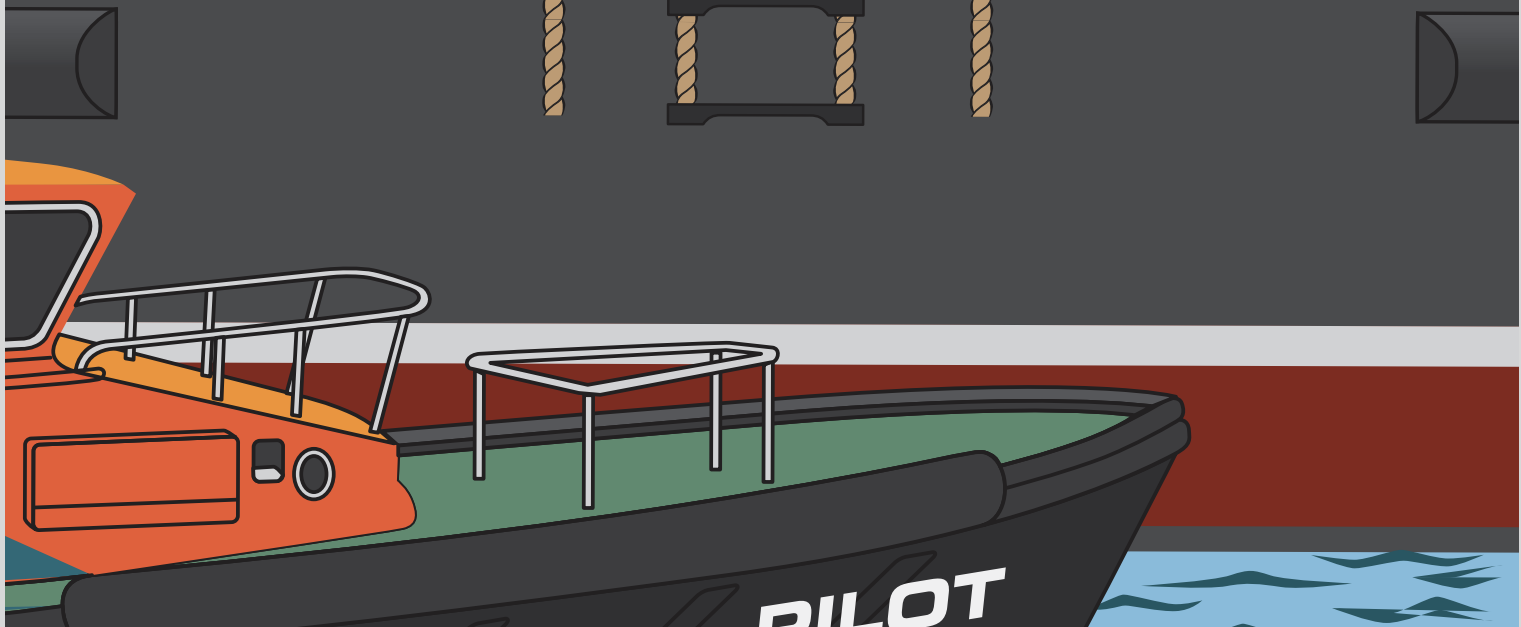


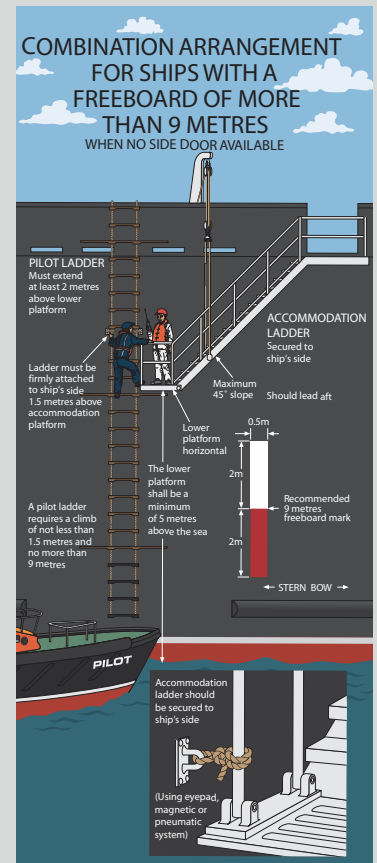
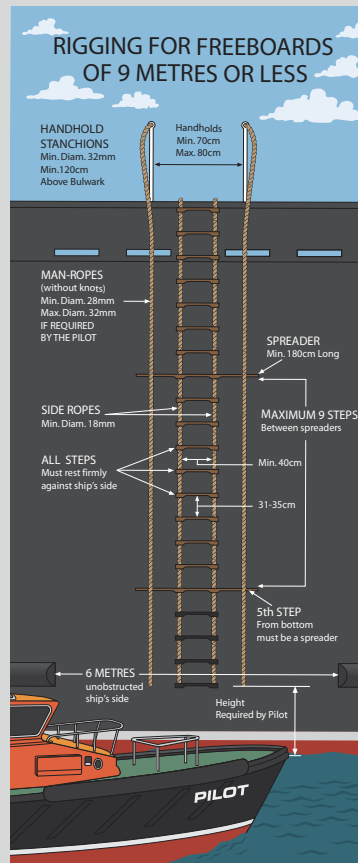
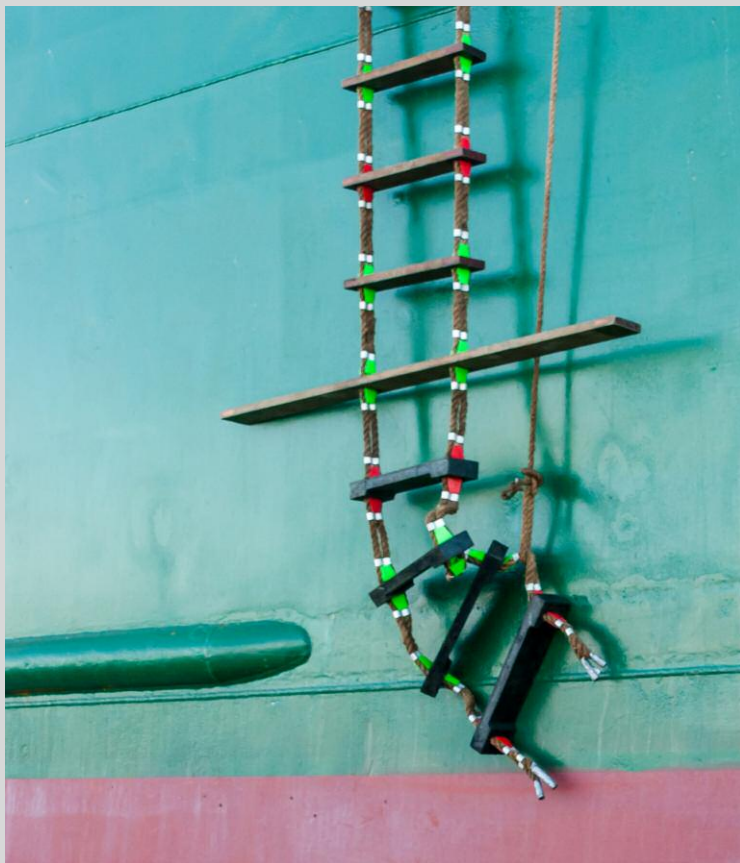
HOLD ON!

PILOT LADDERS – A TRAGIC REMINDER OF THE DANGERS INVOLVED

THE CLUB HAS RECENTLY EXPERIENCED SEVERAL INCIDENTS WHERE CREW OR THIRD PARTIES HAVE LOST THEIR GRIP WHILE USING THE SHIP'S PILOT LADDER, FALLING INTO THE WATER OR ONTO THE QUAYSIDE BELOW. UNFORTUNATELY THESE INCIDENTS ALL RESULTED IN FATALITIES WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED HAD THE RIGHT SAFETY MEASURES BEEN IMPLEMENTED.

None of these incidents actually involved a pilot. Rather, it was a member of the crew or a third party using the pilot ladder, either while measuring the ship's draught or while personnel were being transferred between two ships. So, despite its name, a pilot ladder is often used for several other purposes other than the safe transfer of a pilot to and from a ship. If the ladder is not used as intended, or shortcuts are taken during use, it can be very dangerous.





We look at a number of safety precautions to consider before using a pilot ladder:

WORKING OVER THE SIDE – Whenever the pilot ladder is used or rigged for any other purpose than its intended transfer use, it should be regarded as a “working over the side” situation. As when working aloft or in enclosed spaces, working over the side should be controlled by a Permit to Work (PtW) system as part of the ship’s Safety Management System (SMS). The PtW must ensure that all associated risks are identified and properly mitigated e.g. using proper Personal Protection Equipment (PPE); making sure lifesaving appliances are at the work location in case someone falls overboard; and supervision of the work task by a senior officer.

PROPER RIGGING – The pilot ladder must be rigged and constructed in accordance with regulation V/23 of the SOLAS convention and IMO Resolution A.1045(27) (see the article on pilot transfers in Risk Watch January 2020 – <http://ow.ly/u5RN30sfjimp>). When properly rigged, the pilot ladder should hang vertically and rest along the shipside. Attempting to hold the ladder at an angle (e.g. between two vessels) must be avoided as it’s very hard to hold the ladder at this angle rather than flat against the side, which can easily lead to a fall from the ladder. Holding the ladder at an angle also makes it less stable if there are sudden swells or gusts of wind.

PPE – Proper PPE must be worn as set out in the PtW for working overside. This should include life vest, safety shoes and gloves to ensure a good grip when climbing the ladder. Even when the ladder is hanging straight down against the hull, it can be very strenuous to hold on to it for a prolonged period of time e.g. when reading the ship’s draught, and so a safety harness should also be worn, always safely connected to a fall arrest system onboard.

MAINTENANCE – The pilot ladder, and all other necessary equipment, should be of an approved type, be kept in a good working condition and be maintained in accordance with the manufacturer’s recommendations. The steps of the ladder must be in good condition with no cracks and must have an efficient non-slip surface.

During the pandemic, some ports have denied crew access to the quay. This makes it hard to read the ship’s draught, forcing the crew to use the pilot ladder. We must stress that Members have a duty to provide a safe means of access and a safe working environment, whatever the situation. And there is one other important point – Members should give all crew the right and obligation to stop work if they become aware of unsafe behaviour or situations.

These recent incidents can be linked to crew complacency and highlight situations where shortcuts were taken to achieve the work goal – at the expense of safety. It is very likely that those involved had often watched the pilot climb up and down the pilot ladder without any problems, leading

them to underestimate the risks involved. As these incidents show, such complacency can be fatal.

The International Chamber of Shipping and the International Maritime Pilots’ Association has produced a useful guide.

<http://ow.ly/1Ryf30sfjkl>

