



Ship Type: All Trade Area: Worldwide

Bulletin 481 - 08/06 - The Lowering of Lifeboats - Worldwide

There has reportedly been confusion over the requirements for crew to be in lifeboats during abandon ship drills. The MCA has published a draft marine guidance note (MGN) on measures to prevent accidents with lifeboats. The extensive guidance note compiles current guidance on the safe servicing, maintenance and drilling of lifeboats, and can be found on the MCA website at the following address:

www.mcga.gov.uk/c4mca/mcga-guidance-regulation/mcga-consultations/mcga-consultations-archive/archived_consultations_2006/mcga-consultation-draft-mgn-letter/mcga-consultation-draft-mgn.htm

We would draw the attention of Members to section 2.3 of part 2 of the MGN which states that “Before placing persons onboard a lifeboat, it is recommended that the boat first be lowered and recovered without persons on board to ascertain that the arrangement functions correctly. The boat should then be lowered into the water with only the number of persons on board necessary to operate the boat.”

The MGN also provides guidance for conducting lifeboat drills with free-fall lifeboats. Where permitted, simulated launching should be carried out in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions, taking due note of this MGN. Please see the full MGN for guidelines for simulated launching of free-fall lifeboats.

IMO circular 1207, issued 26 May 2006, states that “in the case of a lifeboat arranged for free-fall launching, at least once every three months during an abandon ship drill the crew shall board the lifeboat, properly secure themselves in their seats and commence the launch procedure up to but not including the actual release of the lifeboat (i.e., the release hook shall not be released). The lifeboat shall then either be free-fall launched with only the required operating crew on board, or lowered into the water by means of the secondary means of launching without the operating crew on board, and then manoeuvred in the water by the operating crew. At intervals of not more than six months, the lifeboat shall either be launched by free-fall with only the operating crew on board, or simulated launching shall be carried out in accordance with the guidelines developed by the Organization”.

This advice is in the form of a draught amendment to SOLAS and the IMO is urging member governments to give the amended regulation early effect, pending its formal entry into force.

An MCA study on the development of lifeboat design has also found that many existing on-load release hooks, whilst satisfying the current regulations, may be inherently unsafe and therefore not fit for purpose. This situation arises because some designs of on-load hook can be described as unstable, in that they have a tendency to open under the effect of the lifeboat’s own weight and need to be held closed by the operating mechanism.

As a result, there is no defence against defects or faults in the operating mechanism, or errors by the crew, or incorrect resetting of the hook after being released. The MCA consider this to be the principal reason for almost all of the more serious accidents that have occurred. Furthermore, the MCA consider that the solution lies not in training or maintenance, but in radical re-design of the hook types involved. Improved maintenance, whilst desirable, is unlikely to be a sufficiently effective risk reduction measure because of the harsh operating environment and dwindling levels of skilled resource on board a ship.

Members concerned with lifeboat incidents are encouraged to read the study, which is available on the MCA website at the following address: www.mcga.gov.uk/c4mca/research_report_555.pdf

Source of information: Maritime and Coastguard Agency draft MGN
www.mcga.gov.uk

International Maritime Organization circular 1207
www.imo.org