

Fall protection reduces risk of falling overboard

The purpose of this Safety Alert is to highlight the increased risk of an overboard incident when workers are in areas with no edge, or fall, protection.

Background

A fishing vessel was returning to port after some time at sea. During the evening, crew members accessed the vessel's roof space. While there, one of the crew moved too close to the edge and fell overboard. The crew member was not wearing a lifejacket.

The crew's response was swift and positive with the crew member being retrieved on board. However, unfortunately the crew member could not be revived. NT WorkSafe's preliminary findings established the roof area had no fall protection suitable for preventing a fall.



The roof area had no fall protection suitable for preventing a fall. (Image: AMSA)

The *Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011* and Regulations apply to commercial vessels, as the vessels are considered workplaces.

Regulations 78 and 79 detail the requirements for managing the risk of falls in the workplace.

Likely contributing factors

- Accessing an unstable, elevated area of a workplace which was not free of trip/slip hazards (such as the vessel stowage/roof area) when there was no provision for three points of contact, or a safe system of work to prevent falls;
- Ineffective provision of information, training and instruction to workers, to enable them to appreciate the hazards at their workplace, and to take care of their safety;

- Lack of supervision or use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); and
- Failure to implement effective procedures to prevent incidents, including risk assessments and toolbox meetings.

Action required

- Implement procedures that establish minimum requirements for working at unguarded or elevated work locations where there is a risk of falls;
- Install appropriate fall prevention measures on all elevated areas of a vessel that workers may need to access. If it is not reasonably practical to install edge protection, other forms of fall restraints should be considered;
- If there is a risk of falling overboard, ensure workers wear a lifejacket, and if possible workers should not work alone;
- Ensure elevated areas (such as roof areas) of the vessel are hazard free, have safe access and egress, with provision for three points of contact;
- Ensure policies and procedures are routinely communicated and reinforced to all workers;
- Routinely review your emergency plan and systems, and practice procedures for foreseeable emergencies like that involving the retrieval of a person who has fallen overboard; and
- Workers need to take reasonable care for their own health and safety, and follow reasonable directions given by, or on behalf of, their employer on issues related to health or safety.

Further information

Legislation

- [Work Health and Safety \(National Uniform Legislation\) Regulations 2011](#) (Part 4.4 Falls)
- [Marine Safety \(Domestic Commercial Vessel\) National Law Act 2012](#) (Part 3 General safety duties)
- [Marine Order 504 \(Certificates of operation and operation requirements – national law\) 2018](#) (Schedule 1 Operation requirements)

Safety Alerts

- [Safe access/egress to marine vessels in port](#)

Codes of Practice

- [Managing the risk of falls at workplaces](#)
- [How to manage work health and safety risks](#)
- [Safe design of structures](#)

Guides

- [Work Health and Safety Handbook – A safety guide for the NT Professional Seafood Industry](#)
- [Risk management in the national system](#)
- [General safety duties for domestic commercial vessels](#)

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