



JAPAN P&I NEWS

To the Members

Rescue Boat Fall Accidents on board Tankers — Preventive Measure

The Federal Bureau of Maritime Casualty Investigation (BSU) published an investigation report and a press release on its official website on 23 July 2026, regarding an uncontrolled fall accident of a rescue boat on board a tanker during a drill.

This accident occurred during a rescue boat launching drill, when the boat descended rapidly due to a hidden technical defect in the launching appliance's winch-unit freewheel module (One-way clutch) caused by corrosive ambient air and moisture within the winch, resulting in injuries to three crew members. The BSU has issued safety recommendations to the German Association for Shipbuilding and Marine Technology (VSM) to inform member manufacturing companies of these technical findings.

(Source: [BSU Investigation Report 271/23](#) and [Press Release 11/26](#))

While drills involving the launching of rescue boats are essential operations to maintain emergency response capabilities, they pose a constant and severe risk of falls from heights. Conducting drills without adhering to pre-inspection routines and safety procedures specified in the vessel's Safety Management System (SMS), thereby deviating from established procedures, is extremely dangerous.

Preventive Measures

- Thorough Open-up Inspections and Planned Maintenance of Launching Appliance Internal Mechanisms (Recognising the Limitations of Visual Inspections):
Internal deterioration, such as corrosion and seizure within the winch (including the freewheel and braking mechanisms)—the root cause of this accident—cannot be detected solely through routine visual inspections or external greasing. Recognising the inherent limitations of visual inspections, it is essential to establish and strengthen a maintenance management system that ensures periodic open-up inspections in accordance with the manufacturer's instruction manual and thorough verification of internal conditions.
- Understanding Structural Risks and Timely Component Replacement:
It is vital to firmly recognise that even equipment that has passed annual inspections may harbor hidden technical defects arising from internal design structures. Preventive maintenance must be strictly implemented to ensure the planned replacement of critical internal components, such as seals and bearings, based on service life and harsh operating environments in accordance with manufacturer recommendations.
- Safeguard of Human Life Assuming Potential Machinery Failures (Strict Adherence to Pre-Inspection and Operational Verification Procedures under the SMS):
Based on the premise that unseen defects may exist within machinery, it is required to strictly adhere to the pre-

inspection routines and operational verification procedures specified in each management company's SMS without omitting them at site discretion, thereby eliminating risks to human life, such as lowering the boat with crew onboard before verifying the safe operation of the equipment.

- **Conducting Risk Assessments and Sharing Technical Insights at Shipboard Safety Committee Meetings:**
Prior to commencing operations such as rescue boat drills, a proper risk assessment must be conducted to assume the worst-case hazard of internal machinery failures, and the identified risks must be shared during Toolbox Meetings. Furthermore, sharing incident cases involving hidden technical defects during Shipboard Safety Committee meetings will enhance overall onboard safety awareness and draw attention to potential machinery risks.

For further practical guidance on risk assessment, you may find the following [P&I Loss Prevention Bulletin](#) helpful: Vol.51 Risk Assessment in Practice issued in June 2021.

In addition, please refer to our explanatory [video](#) on risk assessment.

We remain committed to providing the latest information and technical insights to support our Members in preventing accidents.

Yours faithfully,

The Japan Ship Owners' Mutual Protection & Indemnity Association