Lifeboat Safety Meeting Kit

WHAT’S AT STAKE

All large ships are required to carry lifeboats, to safely hold passengers and crew in the event the ship is damaged or sinking. Deploying lifeboats in an emergency situation is extremely challenging, and ships must prepare for this possibility by holding lifeboat drills to practice the process. Many crew members suffer injuries each year performing these necessary drills, sometimes caused, at least in part, by the negligence of the shipowner.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS OF LIFEBOAT OPERATIONS

The dangers in a lifeboat situation can arise from various factors, primarily stemming from the hazardous conditions at sea and the urgency of the emergency.

Rough weather and sea conditions: Lifeboats are deployed during adverse weather conditions, including storms, high winds, and rough seas which pose a significant risk to the safety and stability of the lifeboat.

Limited resources and supplies: Lifeboats have limited provisions, including food, water, and medical supplies. If the rescue operation extends for an extended period or the lifeboat is overcrowded, the risk of dehydration, malnutrition, and medical complications increases.

Exposure to the elements: Being exposed to the elements for an extended period can lead to hypothermia, heatstroke, or sunburn. Survivors in lifeboats are susceptible to extreme temperatures, intense sunlight, and inclement weather, which can pose significant health risks if not properly managed.

Navigation challenges: Navigating a lifeboat through unfamiliar waters, presents considerable danger. It can lead to collisions with other vessels, grounding, or drifting off course.

Emotional and psychological strain: The uncertainty, fear, and trauma associated with the emergency can impact the mental well-being of survivors and crew members.

Risk of injury or accidents: Lifeboat operations involve the handling of equipment, launching procedures, and potentially rough sea conditions. There is a risk of accidents, injuries, or falls, particularly during the transfer of individuals from the distressed vessel to the lifeboat or during challenging rescue attempts.

Time constraints and urgency: The need to evacuate or rescue survivors promptly adds pressure to the operation, leading to increased risks, or overlooking crucial safety measures.

Common Injury Risks During Lifeboat Drills

Lifeboat drills are known to be dangerous, especially when the entire abandon-ship drill is practiced.

Injuries can happen because of these risk factors:

Failure of release mechanisms. Hooks and releases that have design flaws or fail under load can cause severe injuries when a lifeboat falls.

Insufficient maintenance or inspection. When lifeboats, mechanical parts, or launching equipment are not inspected—or repairs are not made when they fail inspection—they can fail during a drill and cause serious injuries or death.

Lack of proper training for crew members. Without proper training, crew members might be unfamiliar with the types of lifeboats and equipment they will need to operate for a successful lifeboat drill.

Infrequent or incomplete lifeboat drills. Rushing or performing incomplete drills to cut corners on time may have devastating

results as crew members fail to practice the necessary skills on a regular basis.

Communication issues on board. Large ships with multinational crews are often called upon to perform lifeboat drills before they have had the opportunity to work together at sea. Language barriers can cause accidents.

Outdated capacity ratings. Older lifeboats used an average passenger weight of approximately 165 pounds, but average body weights for both men and women are now well above that mark. Overloading lifeboats beyond their weight capacity could result in failure of release wires, hoisting equipment, and the boats themselves.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

BEST LIFEBOAT SAFETY PRACTICES

Follow safety protocols: Pay attention to safety briefings and instructions from the crew. Understand how to properly don a life jacket, use signaling devices, and operate emergency equipment.

Wear a life jacket: Always wear a properly fitted life jacket when on a lifeboat or in the water. Make sure to secure it tightly and adjust the straps for a snug fit.

Stay calm and maintain a positive mindset: In stressful situations, it is crucial to remain calm and focused. Panic can cloud judgment and impede your ability to make rational decisions.

Listen to the instructions of the crew: Crew members have experience and training to handle emergency situations effectively. Cooperate with their directions and communicate any concerns or needs you may have.

Seek shelter from the elements: If the weather conditions permit, seek shelter within the lifeboat to protect yourself from the elements. Minimizing exposure helps prevent hypothermia, heatstroke, or other weather-related risks.

Conserve energy and stay hydrated: Lifeboat situations can be prolonged, so it’s essential to conserve energy and stay hydrated. Drink water regularly and ration your food supplies if necessary. Avoid overexertion and prioritize rest to maintain physical and mental stamina.

Support and help others: Sharing resources, providing emotional support, and working together can enhance everyone’s chances of survival.

Monitor communication and signaling devices: Stay vigilant and be aware of any communication or signaling devices available on the lifeboat. Follow proper protocols when using these devices to maximize their effectiveness.

Be prepared for rescue: Maintain a constant lookout for potential rescue vessels or aircraft. Keep signaling devices readily accessible and be prepared to attract attention when help is nearby.

LIFEBOAT OVERVIEW

By following safety protocols, wearing life jackets, staying calm, cooperating with the crew, seeking shelter, conserving energy, and being prepared for a rescue, individuals can enhance their safety and resilience while in a lifeboat. It is crucial to remain vigilant, adapt to specific circumstances, and prioritize the well-being of oneself and others in the lifeboat.

FINAL WORD

A lifeboat serves as a vital resource in emergency situations at sea, providing a means of escape, survival, and rescue for individuals facing maritime distress. Understanding the importance of safety precautions is essential to protect oneself and maximize the chances of survival.