

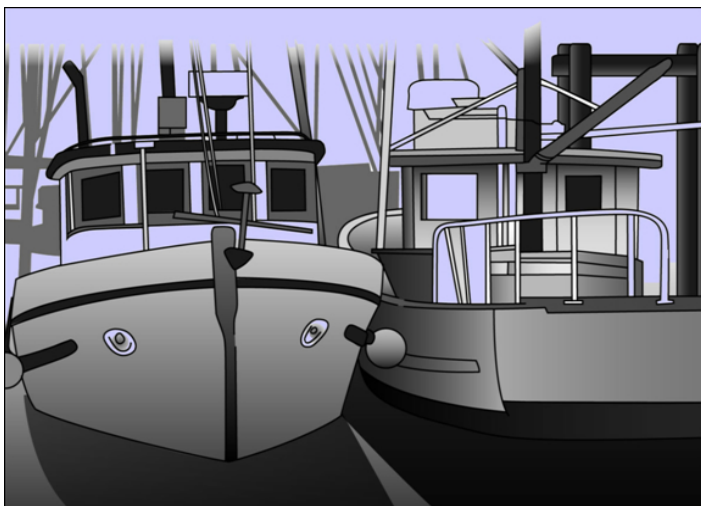
Many ways to take - and avoid – nasty falls



BY HARVEY LINTON
for WorkSafeBC

The greatest risks fishermen face are generally at sea; and falling or being knocked overboard is downright dangerous and potentially deadly. But painful injury and disability can also follow what seem like simple falls: slipping on the float or dock, and where access to the vessel is difficult.

It's easy for fishermen to fall when using wharf ladders, crossing boats rafted together and getting from the boat to the float or vice versa. The risk can be greater in poor lighting and on slippery surfaces, or if you're carrying groceries, gear, duffel bags, etc.



Watch your step when crossing boats and anywhere else you could take a fall.

Moving crew between rafted vessels is often a matter of unspoken agreement between skippers. But they, and in some cases the owners, are responsible for cooperating to ensure safe passage between vessels berthed alongside one another. Consider bulwarks, guardrails, gantries, davits, net drums and power blocks. These vessel features may seem like relatively minor hazards individually, but combined in various mooring arrangements, they create a higher risk for falls.

You can reduce the risks dramatically in most situations with simple preventive medicine to help everyone avoid potentially traumatic experiences. Here are eight lessons I've picked up from fishermen, who unfortunately learned the hard way:

- Gangways, ladders and passageways should be kept as clean and dry as possible; non-skid treads or paint can be assets in slippery situations.
- Try to avoid carrying loads when going up or down ladders, or where steps or gangways are used to board or leave the vessel.
- Keep portable ladders from sliding when in use by positioning them on firm surfaces and securing them to something solid with effective lashing.
- When a ladder or gangway is based on a high bulwark, firmly-fixed steps near a shroud for a handhold should lead from the top of the bulwark to the deck.
- Never use unsecured ladders or ladders with missing or defective rungs, whether on the dock, float or on the vessel.
- A gangway should have sufficient width and strength. Three-foot-high railings or ropes should be provided on both sides, with foot stops and intermediate rails or ropes set no more than 18 inches apart.
- Fishermen must be secured by proper fall protection gear when aloft or outboard from the bulwarks with no float below or when working down the ramp of a stern trawler.
- Stern trawlers should provide suitable protection such as doors, gates or nets at the top of the stern ramp; they should be the same height as the adjacent bulwark or guardrail. When this isn't possible, put a chain or other means of protection across the ramp.

I expect that you're not surprised by most of these. After all, keeping fishermen from being hurt in falls is basically common sense. All that's needed are skippers and crewmembers following safe work practices on board, on the dock and everywhere in between and, of course, at sea.

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