



DCV Safety Alert: 01/2023

SAFE ACCESS TO DOMESTIC COMMERCIAL VESSELS

Purpose

This safety alert aims to raise awareness of the risk involved with getting on and off domestic commercial vessels.

Safe access to vessels

Accessing a vessel while at berth is a routine activity and is sometimes taken for granted. The requirement for safe access can be overlooked, particularly where there are limited berthing options, or a vessel is only berthed for a short period. Failing to provide safe access can result in serious risk to people—even more so when bad weather or extreme tidal variation are thrown into the mix.

Under the National Law, the owner and master are responsible to ensure safety for people boarding a domestic commercial vessel. Your vessel's safety management system should address safe access for crew and others boarding your vessel.

In addition to national law requirements, commercial vessels also need to address risks associated with falls under workplace health and safety regulations—including falls sustained getting on and off a vessel.

Managing access risks

1. Assess the risks

What are they? What could make them worse? What could happen to a person if things go wrong? How bad would the impact be?

2. Implement ways to control those risks.

These may include:

- Ensuring a 'safe design' gangway
- Securing platforms or gangways firmly and clear of the wharf edge or other potential hazards

- Limiting access in bad weather and if necessary, during extreme tidal variations
- Providing adequate lighting around the gangway, especially at night to increase visibility
- Including instructions on when and how to safely board the vessel—and when not to—in your crew safety inductions and signage. Under [the general safety duties](#), crew, passengers and other visitors must follow these instructions
- Encouraging crew to report hazards and incidents associated with getting on and off the vessel.
- Developing emergency procedures for possible incidents associated with access to the vessel i.e. falls, person overboard.
- Ensuring crew are clear about what they need to do—if there is no safe access, do not proceed (report any issues related to safe access)



Example of unacceptable access to a vessel, the unsafe conditions amplified at low tide

Identifying, documenting and managing the risks will help you implement effective risk controls. These could include safe work procedures, regular inspections and maintenance of equipment, appropriate training, induction and supervision of crew.

Document these risks and controls in your safety management system and review them periodically to make sure they are still relevant and practical.

Other factors influencing safe access

Time and resource pressures, poor equipment design and maintenance, and inadequate risk assessments can all impact safety when rigging access equipment.



An example of a boarding platform recently built by the owner of a prawn trawler

Time and resource pressures: Rigging safe access is sometimes seen as a less important activity compared to other tasks when you berth. This can cause safe access arrangements to be rushed or overlooked. Ensure enough time is given so that rigging and retrieval is done properly, and is safe.

Wharf arrangements: When a vessel is alongside at a berth, the provision of safe access is a joint responsibility shared between the vessel and the provider of the berth. Often, it is poor wharf design that prevents landing a gangway, and this has a significant impact on the safety of access arrangements.

Communication: This is important in identifying obstacles to safe access. Items such as water/fuel manifolds, bollards, and electrical installations on the wharf side are common obstructions and are something to consider when allocating berths to vessels. Co-ordination between shore-side and the

vessel's crew can help to mitigate these issues.

Passenger vessels access: For passenger vessels, the provision of safe access needs to take into account that passengers may not be familiar with getting on and off vessels. The use of a single point of access may also facilitate headcounts.

Assess the risks of rigging access: Rigging or adjusting gangways, accommodation ladders, or other access methods involves a heightened level of risk of entanglement, falling from heights, or overboard. Hence, it is also important to conduct a risk assessment of the rigging, adjusting and derigging of access equipment, including the selection of appropriate equipment and secondary means of support.

Reminder

Providing safe access to the vessel is essential in ensuring that everybody remains safe when embarking and disembarking the vessel.

Remember the following:

- **select the right access equipment,**
 - **assess all risks including variations in wharf height; tidal conditions; movement of vessel due to weather and access surfaces,**
 - **allow time for safe rigging, and**
 - **include vessel access equipment in your maintenance plan**
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Related Information

- [Safety alert—safe access/egress to marine vessels in port](#), Northern Territory WorkSafe
- National Standard for Commercial Vessels C1 (Provision 6.8 - Required outcome – safe access to and from vessels) –[Arrangement, accommodation and personal safety - C1 \(amsa.gov.au\)](#)

