The Bahamas Maritime Authority

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Effective Date 09/11/2026

Pilot Transfer Arrangements

Notice to ship owners, managers, Masters, Approved Nautical Inspectors, Recognised Organisations and surveyors

1. Purpose

1.1. This Information Notice provides guidance on pilot transfer arrangements, in order to comply with the provisions of Regulation 23 of Chapter V of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, 1974, as amended (SOLAS Chapter V).

1.2. This Information Notice reflects the amendments to regulation 23 of SOLAS Chapter V adopted by resolution MSC.572(110)[1] and the associated Performance Standards for Pilot Transfer Arrangements MSC.576(110)[2]. These requirements enter into force on 01 January 2028 in accordance with the application and transitional provisions of regulation 23 of SOLAS Chapter V.

2. Application

2.1. Ships on which pilots may be employed shall be provided with arrangements enabling pilots and other personnel to embark and disembark safely in all seagoing conditions of draught and trim.

2.2. **Until 31 December 2027**, pilot transfer arrangements shall comply with regulation 23 of SOLAS Chapter V and the applicable IMO recommendations and standards in force before 1 January 2028.

2.3. Pilot transfer arrangements **installed on or after 01 January 2028**[3] shall comply with regulation 23 of SOLAS Chapter V, as amended by resolution MSC.572(110), and the Performance Standards adopted by resolution MSC.576(110).

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[1] https://mf.bahamasmaritime.net/SharedLinks.aspx?accesskey=1b1e75013bbe95883936acabe5d5f6917ed06fe448a84c4f4a8486d454d128aa&VaultGUID=8A7ABFCE-CCD2-49D8-9190-B5F8650E5B38

[2] https://mf.bahamasmaritime.net/SharedLinks.aspx?accesskey=0829a5729aa023a60779e107eb5ee034a17e949fcbf205ce83732451d84382a2&VaultGUID=8A7ABFCE-CCD2-49D8-9190-B5F8650E5B38

[3] For the purposes of this Information Notice, the meaning of "installed on or after 1 January 2028" is that given in regulation 23.7 of SOLAS Chapter V

2.4. Pilot transfer arrangements installed before 01 January 2028 shall comply with the requirements and transitional provisions applicable to existing arrangements under regulation 23 of SOLAS Chapter V. From 01 January 2028, the applicable inspection, maintenance, spare-equipment and service-life requirements of MSC.576(110) shall be complied with in accordance with those transitional provisions.

2.5. Arrangements installed before 01 January 2028 should be reviewed against MSC.576(110). Where improvements can reasonably be made without major structural alteration, the Company is encouraged to implement them at the earliest opportunity.

2.6. Companies should document the review of existing pilot transfer arrangements against regulation 23 of SOLAS Chapter V and MSC.576(110), identify any modifications or replacement necessary to achieve compliance within the applicable transitional period, and manage the resulting actions through the ship's Safety Management System (SMS) and planned maintenance system (PMS), as appropriate.

3. Introduction

3.1. Marine safety investigation reports published by the BMA and other investigation authorities continue to identify serious accidents, fatalities, incidents and near misses involving pilots and other personnel transferring between ships and boats.

3.2. Casualties have involved pilots, surveyors, inspectors, technicians, service personnel and crew members. Investigations have frequently identified defective pilot ladders, sub-standard pilot transfer arrangements, improper rigging practices, inadequate supervision, unauthorised modifications and deficiencies in inspection and maintenance programmes[4].

3.3. Several investigations have also highlighted the importance of correctly fitted lifejackets and the dangers associated with backpacks, tool bags and other equipment that may adversely affect flotation, lifejacket performance or recovery efforts following a fall into the water.

4. Pilot Transfer Arrangements

4.1. The Performance Standards for Pilot Transfer Arrangements adopted by resolution MSC.576(110) establish a comprehensive framework covering the full lifecycle of pilot transfer arrangements.

4.2. The standards include requirements for the design, manufacture and construction of pilot ladders and associated equipment; detailed provisions for the rigging and use of

[4] Please also refer to BMA Safety Alert 21-01: https://www.bahamasmaritime.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/BMA-Safety-Alert-21-01-Pilot-Transfer-Arrangements.pdf

pilot and combination ladder arrangements; installation and access arrangements on board ships; inspection, maintenance and replacement criteria; familiarisation and training of shipboard personnel; and approval, certification and survey requirements.

4.3. Collectively, these measures are intended to improve the safety of pilots and other personnel embarking or disembarking ships using pilot transfer arrangements.

4.4. Where this Information Notice reproduces or summarises provisions of regulation 23 of SOLAS Chapter V or MSC.576(110), those instruments remain the authoritative requirements. Any supplementary Bahamas requirement or recommendation is expressly identified as such.

4.5. The illustrations in MSC.1/Circ.1428/Rev.1, *Required Pilot Transfer Arrangements for Pilots and Other Personnel*[5], should be used in conjunction with regulation 23 of SOLAS Chapter V and MSC.576(110). These illustrations are reproduced in the Annex to this Notice for easy reference.

5. Pilot Ladder Construction

5.1. Pilot ladders and manropes placed into service on or after 1 January 2028 shall be constructed, approved, marked and certified in accordance with regulation 23 of SOLAS Chapter V and MSC.576(110). ISO 799-1 may be applied where its provisions are consistent with the applicable requirements of regulation 23 of SOLAS Chapter V and MSC.576(110). Where the requirements differ, regulation 23 of SOLAS Chapter V and MSC.576(110) shall take precedence.

5.2. Pilot ladders and manropes required to be type-approved shall be provided with evidence of approval by the BMA or a Recognised Organisation acting on behalf of the BMA. The manufacturer shall maintain the quality-control arrangements required by MSC.576(110). Any modification or alteration affecting an approved pilot transfer arrangement should be subject to appropriate technical review and, where approval is required, referred to the BMA or the Recognised Organisation, as applicable, before the modified arrangement is returned to service.

5.3. Ladder steps, if made of hardwood, should be made in one piece and be free of knots. If the ladder steps are made of material other than hardwood, they should be of equivalent strength.

5.4. The four lowest steps should be of rubber of sufficient strength and stiffness. This becomes a mandatory requirement from 01 January 2028.

5.5. All steps should have an efficient non-slip surface. Steps should not be painted.

[5] https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/OurWork/Safety/Documents/Pilotage/MSC.1-Circ.1428-Rev.1.pdf

5.6. Steps should be not less than 400 millimetres between the side ropes, 115 millimetres wide and 25 millimetres in depth, excluding any non-slip coating or grooving.

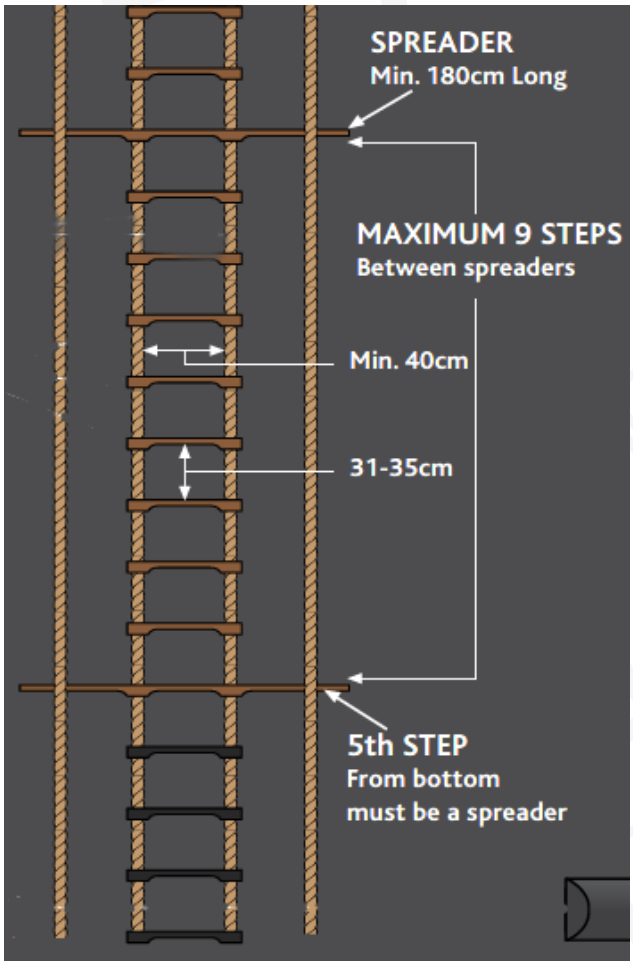
5.7. Steps should be equally spaced - not less than 310 millimetres or more than 350 millimetres apart.

5.8. Steps should be secured in such a manner that each will remain horizontal.

5.9. Repair or replacement of pilot ladder steps or spreader steps is prohibited under the Performance Standards adopted by resolution MSC.576(110). A ladder with a damaged step or spreader should be withdrawn from service and replaced.

5.10. Pilot ladders with more than five steps should have spreader steps of not less than 1.8 metres long installed at regular intervals to prevent the ladder from twisting.

5.11. The lowest spreader step should be the fifth step from the bottom of the ladder and the interval between two spreader steps should not exceed nine steps.



5.12. Permanent markings showing the length to the bottom step should be provided at regular intervals (e.g., 1 metre) throughout the length of the ladder, such as in the following example.



Example of pilot ladder length marking

5.13. The side ropes on each side of the pilot ladder should consist of a double length of uncovered rope not less than 20 millimetres (mm) and not more than 22 mm in diameter. Each pair of side ropes shall be formed from a continuous length of rope, without joints, having a breaking strength of at least 24 kilonewtons (kN), in accordance with MSC.576(110)[6].

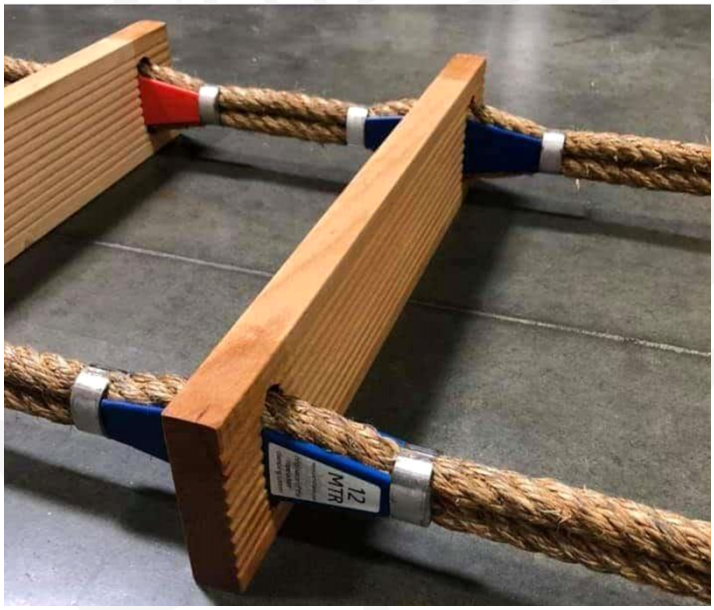
5.14. The midpoint of each double length of side rope should be located on a thimble. The ends of each side rope should be properly finished.

5.15. Side ropes should be made of manila or other material of equivalent strength, durability and elongation characteristics.

5.16. Each pair of side ropes should be secured together both above and below each step with a mechanical clamping device properly designed for this purpose, or seizing method with step fixtures (chocks or wedges), which holds each step level when the

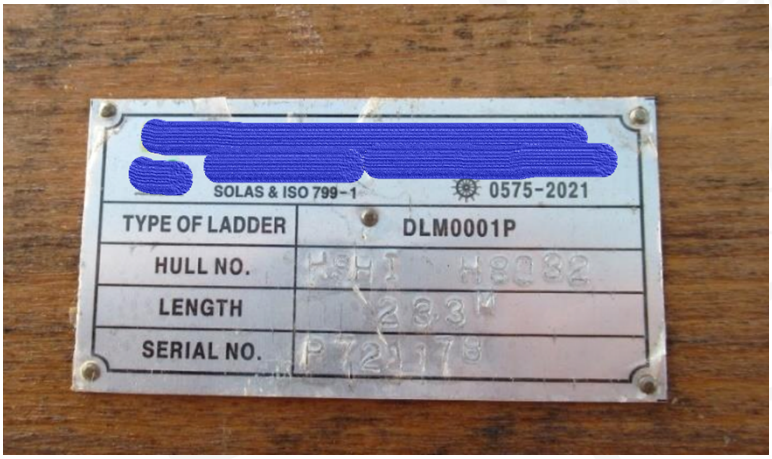
[6] 24 kN is approximately 2447 kilogrammes force (kgf)/5395 pounds force (lb)

ladder is hanging freely. Where a mechanical clamping device is used, it shall grip each side rope in the pair independently and with the same gripping force. Cable ties, U-clamps and worm-driven clips should not be used to secure steps.



5.17. Pilot ladders shall be protected from contact with the ship's hull or any fitting or structure that may cause sharp bending, chafing, abrasion, pinching or other damage to a side rope or manrope. Where contact cannot be avoided by the arrangement, effective permanent protection shall be provided.

5.18. Pilot ladders and manropes should be permanently marked with the manufacturer's name, serial number or other unique identification, date of manufacture, and the name and details of the approving authority.



5.19. Records should be maintained on board showing the date each pilot ladder and set of manropes was placed into service, together with details of inspections, maintenance, withdrawal from service and replacement.

5.20. The height of climb on a pilot ladder should be not less than 1.5 metres and not more than 9 metres from the surface of the water to the point of access in all seagoing conditions of draught and trim.

5.21. Where required by MSC.576(110), a two-tone visual mark shall be provided on the ship's side to indicate whether a combination arrangement is required. The upper half of the mark shall be white and the lower half red, and the mark shall be not less than 4 metres in height and 0.5 metres in width. See the Annex to this Information Notice.

5.22. Where the height of climb exceeds 9 metres, an accommodation ladder should be rigged in conjunction with the pilot ladder. The necessary equipment should be available on each side of the ship unless it is capable of being transferred for use on either side.

5.23. Ships with a large range of operating draughts should be provided with sufficient pilot ladder hanging positions to avoid excessive inclination of the pilot ladder and to enable compliance with the applicable rigging requirements at all operating draughts.

6. Pilot Ladder Rigging

6.1. Personnel involved in the inspection, maintenance, rigging or operation of pilot transfer arrangements shall receive familiarisation appropriate to their assigned duties in accordance with MSC.576(110). Familiarisation shall include, as applicable:

i. inspection and identification of defects;
ii. correct rigging and securing arrangements;
iii. use of pilot ladder winch reels and other mechanical equipment;
iv. maintenance, stowage and withdrawal-from-service criteria; and
v. emergency actions and communication with the bridge.

6.2. Pilot transfer arrangements and associated equipment shall be inspected before use.

6.3. Rigging and recovering pilot transfer arrangements may expose personnel to the risk of falling overboard. The activity should be subject to an appropriate risk assessment and the controls established by the ship's SMS for work over the side or where there is a risk of falling overboard. Appropriate personal protective equipment, including a correctly fitted lifejacket, should be worn where there is a risk of falling into the water.

6.4. The pilot ladder should be rigged clear of any possible discharges from the ship.

6.5. The pilot ladder shall be within the parallel body length of the ship and within the mid-ship half length of the ship.

6.6. The single length of pilot ladder should be capable of reaching the water from the point of access to, or egress from, the ship and due allowance should be made for all conditions of loading and trim of the ship, and for an adverse list of 15°.

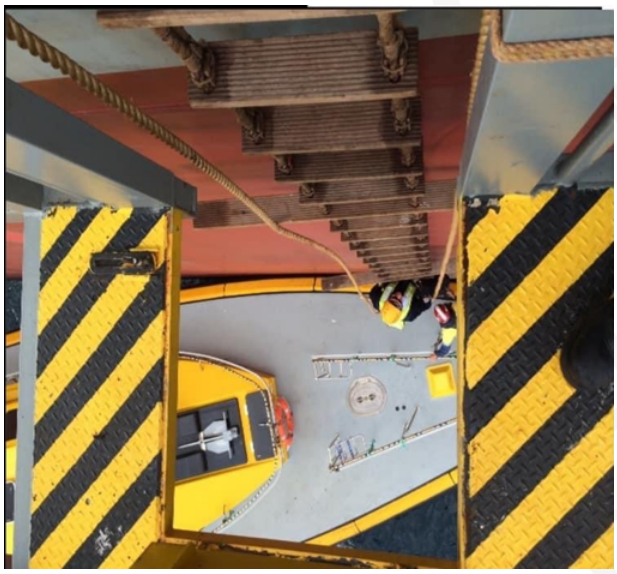
6.7. Means should be provided to ensure safe, convenient and unobstructed passage for any person embarking on, or disembarking from, the ship between the head of the pilot ladder, or of any accommodation ladder, and the ship's deck.

6.8. The accommodation ladder (i.e., a combination arrangement) shall be sited such that the ladder leads aft.

6.9. When a combination arrangement is used, means shall be provided to secure the lower platform of the accommodation ladder to the ship's side, so as to ensure that the lower end of the accommodation ladder and the lower platform are held firmly against the ship's side within the parallel body length of the ship.

6.10. When a combination arrangement is used, the pilot ladder and manropes should be secured to the ship’s side at a point nominally 1.5 metres above the lower platform of the accommodation ladder.

6.11. Where an accommodation ladder with a trapdoor in its lower platform is used, the pilot ladder and manropes should pass through the aperture without obstruction or distortion. The pilot ladder should lie flat against the ship’s side and its highest step should be at least 2 metres above the lower platform. See the Annex to this Information Notice.



6.12. The horizontal distance between the pilot ladder and the lower platform of the accommodation ladder should be not less than 0.1 metres and not more than 0.2 metres.

6.13. The trapdoor should open upwards and be secured either flat on the embarkation platform or against the rails at the aft end or outboard side of the platform and should not form part of the handholds.

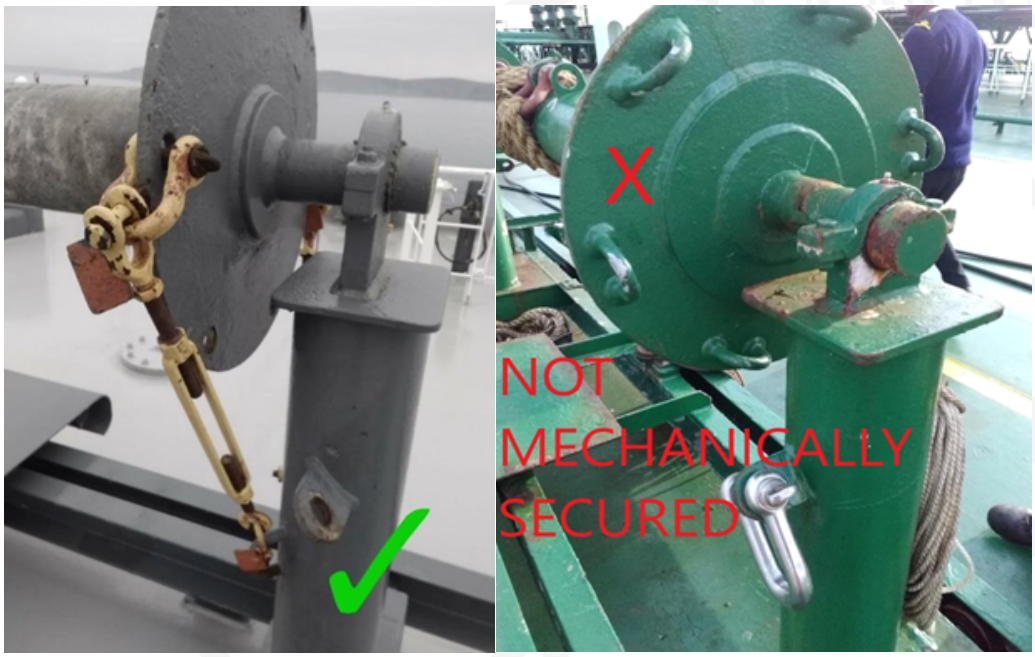
6.14. The pilot ladder shall be secured to dedicated strong points independently of the pilot ladder winch reel. Where the pilot ladder is secured at an intermediate length, the securing arrangement shall be type-approved for the purpose, shall prevent slippage of the side ropes and shall have a breaking strength of not less than 48 kN[7].



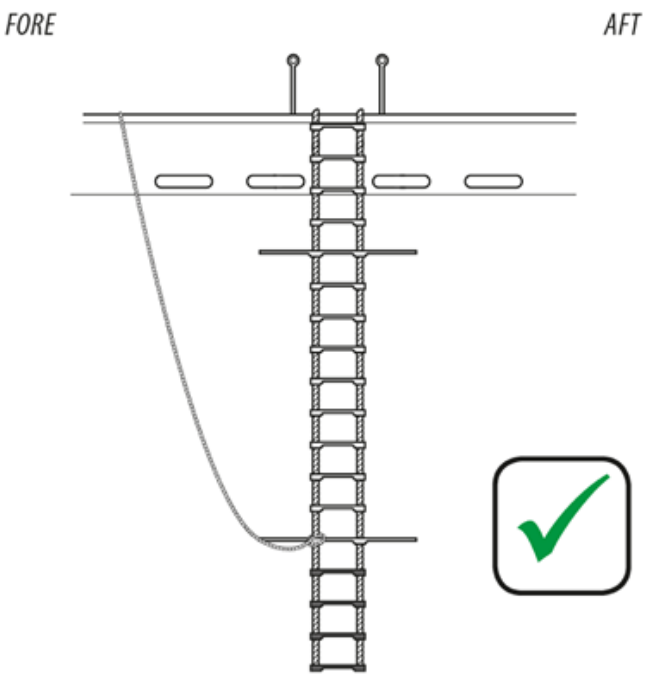
6.15. The pilot ladder winch reel should not be relied upon to support the pilot ladder when the pilot ladder is in use.

6.16. All pilot ladder winches should have means of preventing the reel from being accidentally operated as a result of mechanical failure or human error.

[7] 48 kN is approximately 4895 kilogrammes force (kgf)/10791 pounds force (lb)



6.17. When a retrieval line is necessary for safe rigging, it should be secured to the forward end of the pilot ladder at or above the lowest spreader step and should lead forward. The retrieval line should not hinder the pilot or other personnel being transferred or obstruct the safe approach of the pilot boat.



7. Associated equipment and access to the ship's deck

7.1. Strong points, shackles and securing ropes used for pilot transfer arrangements shall have a minimum breaking strength of 48 kN. Compliance for new or modified arrangements shall be demonstrated by approved design documentation, material certification or other evidence accepted by the Recognised Organisation. The minimum breaking strength shall not be verified by destructive testing of an installed fitting.

7.2. Where the capacity of an existing strong point cannot be demonstrated by documentation or calculation, the capacity should be verified by a method acceptable to the Recognised Organisation, which may include an appropriate proof-load test where considered necessary, taking account of the fitting's design, material and condition.

7.3. Two manropes of not less than 28 millimetres and not more than 32 millimetres in diameter, properly secured to the ship, should be available if required by the pilot or other personnel embarking or disembarking.

7.4. The manropes shall reach the height of the stanchions or bulwarks at the point of access to the deck before terminating at the ring plate on deck.

7.5. A lifebuoy equipped with a self-igniting light and a heaving line should be available at hand and ready for immediate use.

7.6. Adequate forward-shining lighting shall be provided to illuminate the transfer arrangements overside and the position on deck where a person embarks or disembarks.

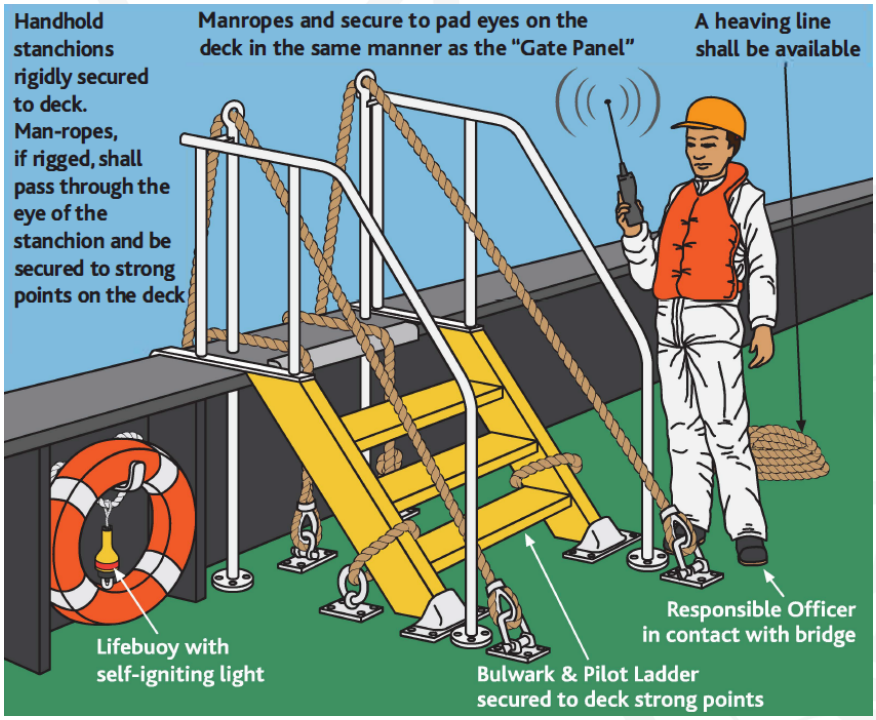
7.7. Before each transfer, the responsible officer should confirm that the complete pilot transfer arrangement has been correctly rigged and is safe for use. The pre-transfer check should include, as applicable:

i. the condition of the pilot ladder, manropes and associated equipment;
ii. correct positioning and rigging of the arrangement, taking account of the ship's draught, trim and list;
iii. correct securing to designated strong points and, where applicable, the correct rigging of the combination arrangement;
iv. safe and unobstructed access between the transfer arrangement and the ship's deck;
v. adequate lighting and readiness of the required lifesaving and safety equipment;
vi. effective communication with the navigation bridge; and

vii. confirmation that any defect or unsafe condition has been rectified before the arrangement is used.

7.8. The rigging of pilot transfer arrangements and the embarkation and disembarkation of pilots and other personnel should be supervised by a designated responsible officer having means of communication with the navigation bridge. The responsible officer should personally inspect the rigging and condition of the complete arrangement before each use and should not delegate this inspection or the supervision of the transfer solely to ratings or other crew members. The responsible officer should arrange for the pilot to be escorted by a safe route to and from the navigation bridge and for other personnel to be escorted to an appropriate safe location.

7.9. A bulwark ladder, two handhold stanchions rigidly secured to the ship's structure at or near their bases and at higher points shall be fitted. The bulwark ladder shall be securely attached to the ship to prevent overturning.



7.10. Ship's side doors used for pilot transfer should not open outwards unless located below the freeboard deck. Where a boarding platform is provided at a side door, the pilot ladder and manropes shall be secured to the ship's side at a point nominally 1.5 metres above the platform, in accordance with MSC.576(110). The arrangement shall ensure that the ladder lies flat against the ship's side and that the person transferring can pass safely and unobstructed between the ladder and the platform. See the Annex to this Information Notice.

7.11. Mechanical pilot hoists shall not be used. This prohibition applies to all ships.

7.12. Companies should consider the following good practices:

i. incorporating appropriate pilot transfer best practice into SOLAS training manuals;
ii. conducting pilot ladder rigging training drills;
iii. maintaining design, certification and test records for strong points and arranging verification by the Recognised Organisation where the documented capacity cannot be established;
iv. assessing arrangements to ensure safe access where trapdoors are provided; and
v. engaging with the International Maritime Pilots' Association (IMPA)[8] and making use of relevant IMPA guidance and safety information.

8. Inspection, Maintenance and Operational Readiness

8.1. Pilot transfer arrangements should be maintained in good condition and be ready for immediate use at all times.

8.2. Pilot ladders, accommodation ladders used as part of a combination arrangement, manropes, winch reels, securing arrangements, access arrangements, handholds, stanchions and associated equipment should be inspected before and after each use by a responsible officer.

8.3. In addition to the inspections required by paragraph 8.2, a detailed inspection of the complete pilot transfer arrangement should be carried out at intervals not exceeding three months.

8.4. Particular attention should be paid to:

i. pilot ladders, including spare ladders carried on board;
ii. accommodation ladders used as part of a combination arrangement;
iii. manropes;
iv. pilot ladder winch reels;
v. securing arrangements and strong points;
vi. access arrangements, including bulwark ladders, handrails and stanchions;
vii. means used to secure a pilot ladder at an intermediate length, including clamping or gripping devices and the associated dedicated strong points; and
viii. stowage arrangements.

8.5. Pilot transfer arrangements should be protected from deterioration caused by moisture, icing, sunlight, chemicals, oils, greases and other contaminants. Equipment

[8] https://www.impahq.org/

not in use should be properly stowed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

8.6. From 1 January 2028, a maintenance plan shall be developed and maintained on board in accordance with MSC.576(110). The maintenance plan shall include appropriate inspection checklists, maintenance, repair and stowage instructions, a schedule of periodic inspection and maintenance, sources of spare parts or replacements, inspection and maintenance records, and details of when pilot ladders and manropes were placed into service and their anticipated withdrawal from service. The inspection checklists should include an appropriate pre-transfer check covering the matters identified in paragraph 7.7.

8.7. Inspection and maintenance records should be retained on board and should include details of defects identified, corrective actions taken and the date equipment was placed into service.

8.8. The Company should ensure that the inspection, maintenance, certification and replacement of pilot transfer arrangements are appropriately managed through the ship's SMS and PMS. Records should provide traceability of equipment certification, condition, date placed into service, inspection and maintenance history, and planned withdrawal or replacement.

8.9. From 1 January 2028, at least one spare pilot ladder and one spare set of manropes complying with the applicable requirements shall be carried on board. Spare equipment should be included in the ship’s inspection, maintenance and stowage arrangements.

8.10. Pilot ladders, manropes and associated equipment should be removed from service where defects are identified that may affect their safe use.

8.11. From 1 January 2028, pilot ladders and manropes, including spares, shall be removed from service where they do not comply with the applicable requirements of MSC.576(110), or within 36 months after the date of manufacture or within 30 months after the date of being placed into service, whichever occurs first.

9. Periodical testing and replacement

9.1. Until 31 December 2027, any periodical testing required by the applicable approved standard, manufacturer’s instructions, Recognised Organisation requirements or existing certification should continue to be carried out.

9.2. From 1 January 2028, pilot ladders and manropes shall be inspected, maintained and removed from service in accordance with the applicable requirements of regulation 23 of SOLAS Chapter V and MSC.576(110).

9.3. The manufacturer, Recognised Organisation or the BMA may require additional examination or testing where the condition, certification or service history of the equipment gives reason to doubt its continued suitability.

10. Casualty Prevention

10.1. From 1 January 2028, regulation 23 of SOLAS Chapter V and MSC.576(110) apply to pilot transfer arrangements used for the transfer of pilots and other personnel. Until that date, the BMA strongly recommends that an equivalent standard of safety is applied whenever any person uses a pilot transfer arrangement.

10.2. The same standards of rigging, supervision, inspection and maintenance should be applied regardless of whether the person embarking or disembarking is a pilot, surveyor, inspector, technician, auditor or crew member.

10.3. Deficiencies affecting pilot transfer arrangements should be treated as critical safety defects and rectified before use.

10.4. Companies are encouraged to review relevant marine safety investigation reports and incorporate applicable lessons learned into their SMS, risk assessments and onboard training. Particular attention is drawn to the following reports:

i. FRI SEA – Man overboard during pilot ladder recovery[9]; and
ii. SUNMI / PATROL – Pilot fatality during transfer[10].

11. Queries

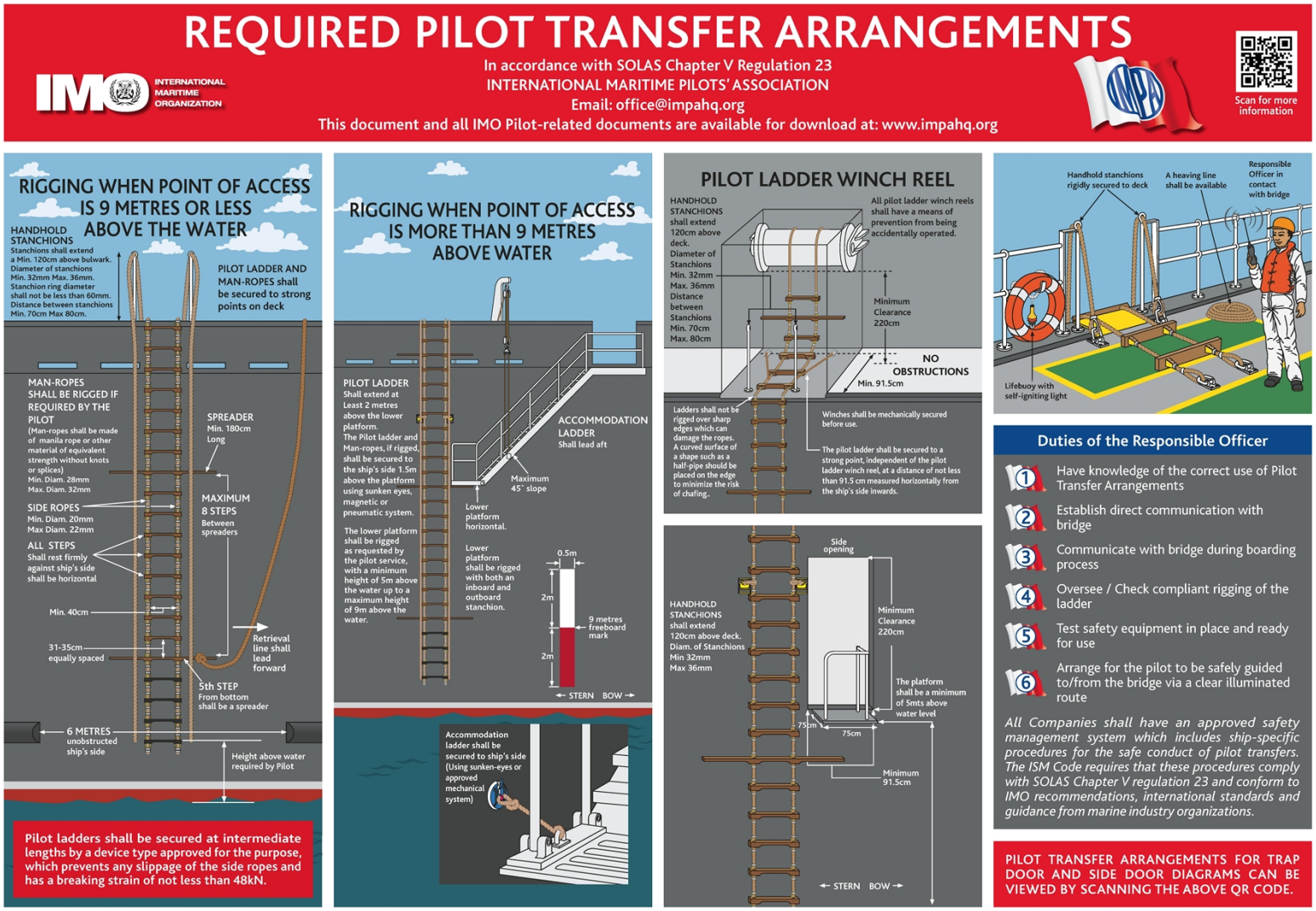
11.1. Any queries relating to pilot transfer arrangements should be made to the Inspections & Surveys Department by emailing tech@bahamasmaritime.com or contacting any BMA office.

[9] https://www.bahamasmaritime.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/BMA-Report-Fri-Sea-man-overboard.pdf
[10] https://www.bahamasmaritime.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Investigation-Report-Pilot-fatality-during-transfer-to-the-Sunmi.pdf?swcfpc=1

Revision History

Version	Description of Revision
1.0	First Issue
1.1	Correction of formatting error
1.2	New para. 2.3, para 4.1 and 5.8 amended.
1.3	5.16 and 6.8 pictures changed. Added 7.10.vi
1.4	Added section 8. Periodical Strength Testing Procedure
2.0	Updated to reflect the amendments to regulation 23 of SOLAS Chapter V and the Performance Standards for Pilot Transfer Arrangements adopted by resolution MSC.576(110). Clarified application and transitional provisions, requirements for construction, rigging, securing and access arrangements, and inspection, maintenance, replacement and familiarisation requirements. Updated pilot transfer illustrations and consolidated the IMO illustrations in a new Annex.

Annex – Illustrations of required pilot transfer arrangements



Annex – Illustrations of required pilot transfer arrangements

REQUIRED PILOT TRANSFER ARRANGEMENTS FOR TRAP DOOR AND SIDE DOOR

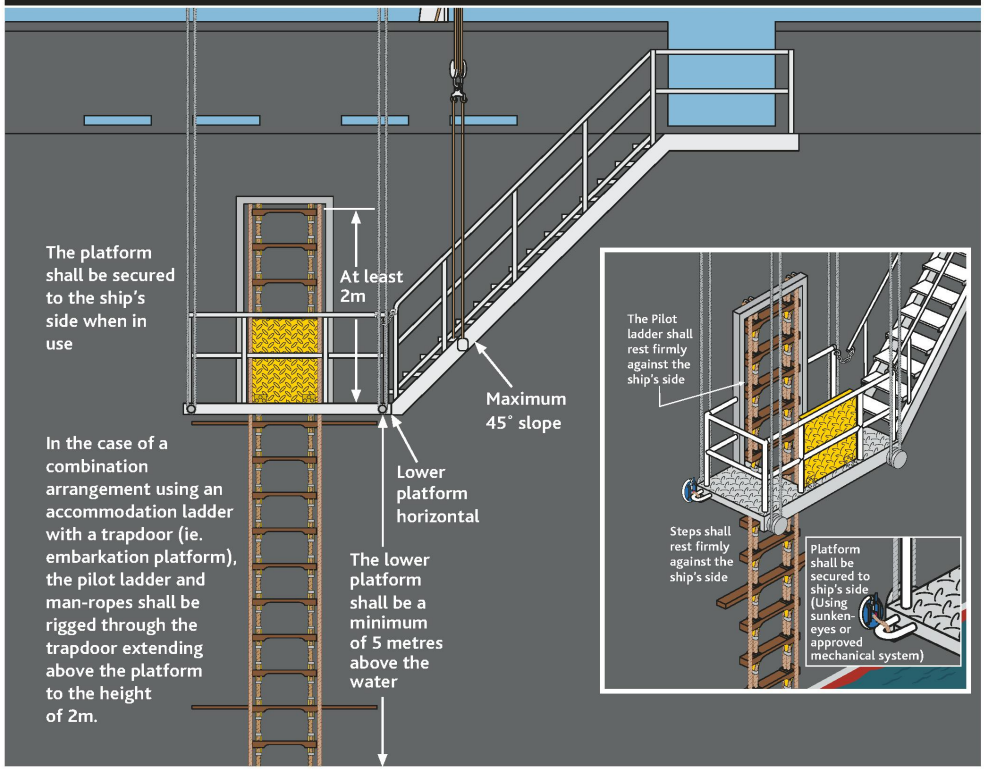
IMO INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION

In accordance with SOLAS Chapter V Regulation 23

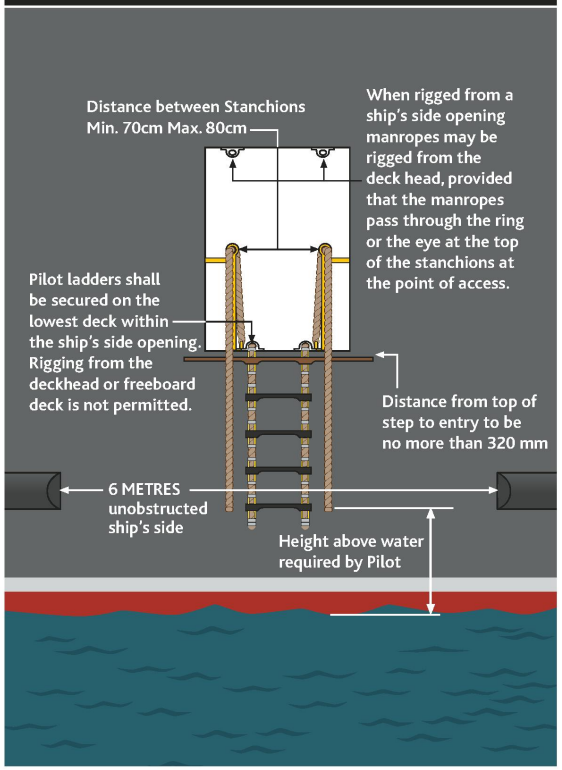
INTERNATIONAL MARITIME PILOTS' ASSOCIATION

Email: office@impahq.org This document and all IMO Pilot-related documents are available for download at: www.impahq.org

ACCOMMODATION LADDER (TRAP DOOR ARRANGEMENT)



SIDE DOOR ARRANGEMENT



NON-COMPLIANT PRACTICES

IMO INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION

In accordance with SOLAS Chapter V Regulation 23
INTERNATIONAL MARITIME PILOTS' ASSOCIATION
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