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Free-fall lifeboats on ships with forward accommodation

The Norwegian Maritime Authority (NMA) has identified an increasing number of ships built with forward accommodation and aft free-fall lifeboats and, consequently, a need to make the legislation clearer.

SOLAS Chapter III Regulation 31.1.1 requires cargo ships of more than 85 metres in length to carry one or more lifeboats.
As a main rule, there shall be lifeboat(s) of such aggregate capacity on each side of the ship as will accommodate the total number of persons on board.

Instead of having one or more lifeboat(s) on each side, the cargo ship may carry free-fall lifeboat(s) capable of being launched over the stern of the ship, cf. SOLAS Chapter III Regulation 31.1.2. In addition, there shall be one or more liferafts on each side of the ship, and the liferafts on at least one side shall be served by launching appliances.

Pursuant to SOLAS Chapter III Regulation 11, lifeboats and liferafts for which approved launching appliances are required shall be stowed as close to accommodation and service spaces as possible.
Moreover, the provision sets out that muster stations shall be provided close to the embarkation stations, and that the muster and embarkation stations shall be readily accessible from accommodation and work areas.

When the free-fall lifeboat is stowed aft and the accommodation is forward, the arrangement will come into conflict with these requirements. Below, the NMA identifies the measures that need to be taken in order for the arrangement to be considered equivalent to having one or more lifeboats on each side of the vessel:

- The route to the muster station and the passageway between the muster and embarking stations are forming an escape route in accordance with the requirements of SOLAS Chapter II-2 Regulation 13. A minimum of two escape routes are required for the area between the muster and embarkation stations.
- The escape routes may not pass through spaces below deck.

- The escape routes must be illuminated, and the illumination shall be supplied by the emergency source of electrical power required by SOLAS Regulation II-1/42 or II-1/43.
- The escape routes must be safe and protected against sea water on deck, gas zones and fire hazard areas on board the ship.
- The Load Line Convention regulation 25 (4) requires that the crew shall be able to get safely to and from their quarters, the machinery space and other spaces used in the essential operation of the ship, and regulation 25-1 describes how this requirement should be met.
- If permanent gangways or walkways fitted with guard rails are used to satisfy the requirement, these may be used as escape routes between the muster and embarkation stations, provided that they also meet the requirements for escape routes.
- Liferafts required by SOLAS Regulation III/31.1.2.2 shall be stowed close to the ship's accommodation spaces.

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Countersigning
title