

Code of Practice for the Embarkation and Disembarkation of Pilots on the Thames 2008



CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| FOREWORD | iii |
| 1 INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 2 THE PILOT BOAT | 1 |
| 3 LEAVING THE BERTH | 2 |
| 4 BOARDING AND LANDING AREAS | 3 |
| 5 ON APPROACHING THE SHIP | 4 |
| 6 THE SHIP | 5 |
| 7 LOW FREEBOARD SHIPS | 6 |
| 8 PILOT EMBARKATION OPERATION | 6 |
| 9 PILOT DISEMBARKATION OPERATION | 8 |
| 10 LEAVING THE SHIP'S SIDE | 8 |
| 11 HEAVY WEATHER CONDITIONS | 9 |
| 12 POOR VISIBILITY | 9 |
| 13 MAN OVERBOARD PROCEDURES | 10 |
| 14 TRAINING FOR THE RETRIEVAL OF CASUALTIES | 10 |
| 15 EMBARKATION/DISEMBARKATION OPERATIONS INVOLVING NON-REGULAR SHIPS AND TUGS | 11 |
| ANNEX | 13 |
| MPA Required Boarding Arrangements for Pilots | |
| REFERENCES | 14 |

**CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE EMBARKATION AND
DISEMBARKATION OF PILOTS ON THE THAMES
2008**

FOREWORD

The purpose of this Code is to act as a guide to safe practice in the boarding and landing of Pilots by pilot boat and is commended to all those involved in the provision of a pilotage service. The Code not only covers the act of transfer between a pilot boat and ship, but in addition also addresses issues such as the actual pilot boat, boarding/landing areas, responsibilities of all of those involved in the transfer and their training. It should be used primarily as a guide to safe operating procedures which can be adapted to suit particular locations or circumstances.

The Code has been updated to incorporate current SOLAS and UK legislation and in particular the Guide to Good Practice associated with the Port Marine Safety Code.

July 2008

1. INTRODUCTION

This edition of the PLA Code of Practice, which is also adopted by the Medway Ports, has been written to incorporate the content of the new version of a separate Code of Practice entitled (*The Embarkation and Disembarkation of Pilots*), prepared jointly by the Marine/Pilotage Working Group of the British Ports Association, the UK Major Ports Group and the Technical & Training Committee of the United Kingdom Maritime Pilots' Association. An additional section is included in the PLA Code which describes local arrangements at the Coryton & Shell Haven Jetties where Pilot transfers may be conducted using tugs which have the requisite licences.

2. THE PILOT BOAT

A Competent Harbour Authority (CHA) must ensure that any pilot boats in service meet the requirements of the Merchant Shipping (Small Workboats and Pilot Boats) Regulations 1998 and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) Code of Practice for the Safety of Small Workboats and Pilot Boats and any subsequent additions or amendments. In addition, the CHA must, in accordance with the Pilotage Act 1987, approve or licence the pilot boats regularly employed in the provision of a pilotage service, having satisfied itself that they are suitable for such use.



Prior to leaving the berth and at least once per watch, the Coxswain should ensure that the boat is in all respects ready for sea. Hatches and watertight openings should be closed when underway and any deck lighting should be routinely tested. An up to date log should be maintained onboard to include entries of all such safety checks. If possible, mooring ropes should remain ashore and any ropes left onboard must be properly stowed. The deck of the pilot boat should be clear of all unnecessary obstructions allowing clear passage and movement to the Pilot and crew. Both the Pilot and crew should be familiar with the stowage of the safety equipment and its operation.

3. LEAVING THE BERTH

The pilot boat should not leave a berth unless it is in all respects ready for sea and properly manned. Furthermore, the boat should only operate within the terms of the MCA Pilot Boat Certificate, which should be clearly displayed onboard. The CHA should establish procedures for routine reports from the boat's crew to operational staff ashore with respect to departing, completing the assigned task and returning to the berth. These reports should include the number of persons on board.



All pilots and crew should wear appropriate protective clothing and buoyancy equipment as required by the CHA. Pilots should be aware of the potential dangers associated with auto-inflation lifejackets in the event of flooding or should the pilot boat capsize.



4. BOARDING AND LANDING AREAS

The CHA should identify and evaluate areas for the boarding and landing of pilots ensuring that there is sufficient sea room for ships to manoeuvre depth of water and where possible, shelter from the more exposed elements of prevailing winds and weather. Additionally, these areas should be located where there is minimal seabed gradient and shipping activity. Such areas should be clearly defined in nautical publications and marked on the appropriate charts.

5. ON APPROACHING THE SHIP

It is important that VHF contact is established between the pilot boat and all vessels to be served, in good time in order to confirm their relative positions and intended movements so that a safe plan for conducting pilot transfers can be agreed. The pilot boat Coxswain should advise the ship of the side on which to rig the pilot ladder, the required distance of the lower step above the water and the heading/speed in order to establish the best lee for the pilot transfer. Due allowance should be made for the close proximity of other vessels, intended movements, the possible effects of wash and any set due to wind and tidal stream. On approaching a ship from ahead on the same side as the pilot ladder care must be taken to ensure the wash from the pilot boat does not interfere with the safe embarkation/disembarkation of the Pilot. It is prudent to use a searchlight at night to check for incoming wash. It will be necessary for vessels to get underway if they are unable to provide a lee whilst at anchor.

During the approach to the ship both the Pilot and Deckhand should remain in the cabin until instructed to proceed forward by the Coxswain. This is to ensure that the boat has reduced speed, in the lee of the vessel and settled ready for the transfer to take place. The pilot boat radar should be switched to standby before the Pilot uses the ladder. At night and during the final approach, the pilot boat searchlight should be used to illuminate the pilot ladder and forward deck of the pilot boat before anyone proceeds on deck.

In adverse conditions where there is significant risk to personnel or the pilot boat, the Coxswain should make the ultimate decision whether to place the boat alongside the ship.

6. THE SHIP

The ship should rig a pilot ladder or combination on the side requested and in accordance with the regulations stated in SOLAS Chapter V Reg. 23 and Annex 21 IMO Resolution A889 (21) (1999). These requirements are described at the Annex. The SOLAS Regulations and the diagrams at Annex cannot prescribe for the safe rigging of a pilot ladder in every configuration or type of vessels construction. If a Pilot considers the rigging of a pilot ladder to be inappropriate, he should convey his views to the vessel Master and complete a deficiency report. Operations should not be undertaken with ships that do not fully comply with the regulations. The ladder should be rigged and secured at the ship's side or side door as near mid ships as practical, and on the parallel body of the ship, clear of all overboard discharges. The ladder should sit flush against the ship's side and if a list is unavoidable the ladder should be rigged on the side opposite to the list. When rigging an accommodation ladder it must lead aft to the pilot ladder and be rigged sufficiently high to allow the pilot boat to lie alongside the pilot ladder without any risk of the pilot boat coming into contact with the accommodation ladder due to any swell.



During the pilot transfer the supervising ship's officer should be in direct contact with the bridge. The ship should maintain steerage way at speed that allows the pilot vessel to remain comfortably alongside and should not stop or reverse engines except in an emergency or when requested by the pilot boat Coxswain.

7. LOW FREEBOARD SHIPS

When a ship has a low freeboard similar to the pilot boat, the transfer can be particularly hazardous since the boat will have insufficient hull of the ship to work against. Such situations are made more difficult in adverse weather conditions when both the pilot boat and ship may roll or pitch creating an increased risk of injury to the Pilot and/or Deckhand, and possible damage to the pilot boat should it become "hung up" on the ship's gunwale. The increased amount of time necessary to conduct a safe transfer under such conditions means that the intended course and speed is critical to ensure the ship and the pilot boat do not run into danger.

8. PILOT EMBARKATION OPERATION

The decision whether or not to attempt to put a pilot boat alongside a vessel is the responsibility of the Coxswain whereas the Pilot will make the decision whether to embark.

The Deckhand and the Pilot should be wearing approved buoyancy aids and protective clothing secured in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. It is recommended that the Deckhand be secured by a life line to the pilot boat whilst on deck, without the line restricting his freedom of movement. When leaving the cabin the Deckhand, followed by the Pilot, should pass along the outboard side of the cabin to the boarding position. The Deckhand should be ready to lift the end of the pilot ladder clear of the pilot boat when coming alongside since if the ladder becomes trapped it can place excessive strain on the ladder and cause damage to the boat. Before the Pilot steps onto the ladder he should establish it is secure by talking to the crew at the top of the ladder.



The Pilot should not embark if there is nobody at the top of the ladder. The stepping off the pilot boat onto the ladder requires timing so as to step onto the ladder at the top of a wave or roll. If conditions are such as to create any risk of injury then the attempt should be abandoned.

Where the Pilot has a reasonably short climb, it is better for the pilot boat to remain alongside whilst the climb is completed to ensure the pilot boat does not foul the ladder when leaving the vessel's side. However, with a long climb, the Pilot may prefer the pilot boat to move away from the vessel's side in order to avoid serious injury in the event of a fall. Such a decision should be made as a result of consultation between Pilot and Coxswain prior to the Pilot leaving the cabin. If the pilot boat leaves the vessel's side, particular care must be made not to foul the ladder.



When boarding using a pilot hoist, a ladder must be rigged adjacent to the hoist and available for immediate use in the event of mechanical failure. The Pilot should climb the flexible short pilot ladder into the rigid upper section before indicating that he is ready to be hoisted when the pilot vessel should move away from the ship. The Pilot must ensure that no part of his clothing or equipment becomes entangled in the hoist mechanism.

9. PILOT DISEMBARKATION OPERATION

As with boarding, communication should be established between the vessel and pilot boat to make arrangements in advance. Before leaving the bridge the Pilot should inform the Master of the traffic situation, any navigational dangers and the need to keep a lee until the Pilot is safely disembarked and the pilot boat clear of the ship's side. The Pilot should also obtain an assurance from the Master that the pilot ladder is properly secured. Before stepping onto the ladder the Pilot should check that it is properly rigged and that the Deckhand is at the bottom of the ladder, having ensured that it is at the correct height. The Deckhand should advise the Pilot how many steps to go when descending the ladder especially in adverse weather and give physical help as required. When all personnel are safely in the cabin the Deckhand should proceed aft checking that the decks are clear and safe. The decision as to whether to disembark from a ship rests with the Pilot.

10. LEAVING THE SHIP'S SIDE

Should the pilot boat have any difficulty leaving the side of a ship the Coxswain should communicate the problem to the Master and request that appropriate action be taken to alter the heading/speed of the vessel.

11. HEAVY WEATHER CONDITIONS

In heavy weather, pilot boats should proceed at a speed appropriate to the sea state and design of the boat. Maximum use should be made of seating and seatbelts where fitted. Loose equipment and stores should be stowed to avoid injury.



12. POOR VISIBILITY

The pilot boat must be allowed extra time on task in order to proceed at a safe speed in poor visibility. Radar, and AIS when fitted must be operated and the fog signal sounded. The Coxswain must determine by radio with the ship its position, course and speed, and position relative to other vessels. Rule 19 should be observed at all times the Coxswain making an approach around the stern and not across the ship's head.

In all cases where visibility is impaired the Deckhand should act as lookout until the ship and any navigational marks are sighted by the Coxswain. In poor visibility the Coxswain should wait until the Deckhand has returned to the cabin and is acting as lookout before departing the ship.

13. MAN OVERBOARD PROCEDURES

In the event of a man overboard, the priority is to locate the casualty and keep him in sight, a task to which all crew and Pilots must devote their whole attention (subject to keeping a proper navigational lookout). The Coastguard, VTS and shipping should be informed immediately and an emergency communication channel established. Once the casualty is located, the retrieval equipment can be prepared and deployed as the pilot boat is positioned. Recovery should be made using a well-practised drill. A full report of the incident should be forwarded by the Coxswain to the appropriate manager.



14. TRAINING FOR RETRIEVAL OF CASUALTIES

The success of any rescue is directly related to the expertise of the boat crew and Pilots and their training with regard to the recovery equipment, treatment of hypothermia, artificial resuscitation and first aid. All sea-going pilotage staff should receive training in resuscitation and the treatment of hypothermia to the standards defined in MGN 50 (M). Furthermore, during initial training Pilots should operate the recovery equipment as part of a man overboard drill. Retrieval drills for boat crews and checks of the equipment should be regularly carried out and recorded in the log book.

15. EMBARKATION / DISEMBARKATION OPERATIONS INVOLVING NON-REGULAR SHIPS AND TUGS

When boarding ships that do not comply with the requirement of the Pilot Transfer Arrangements (Sections 8 & 9), care must be taken to establish a safe means of transfer. A risk assessment should be carried out with the Pilot making the actual decision whether to board the ship. Ships without parallel sides such as high speed craft and some Ro-Ro vessels may request that the Pilot join at the previous port.



Pilot Transfers using Tugs

Preparations on the Tug

Before a tug goes alongside a vessel to transfer a Pilot, VHF communications must be established between the Tug master and the Master of the vessel or the Pilot. The tug should only proceed alongside when the vessel has confirmed that it is steady on course/speed and ready to receive the tug having established a suitable lee. A Deckhand must be in attendance at the foot of the pilot ladder to assist the boarding or landing of the Pilot and to ensure that the ladder does not foul on any

part of the tug. If the height of the bottom of the pilot ladder above the water is incorrect for the tug, the tug should inform the vessel so that the situation can be corrected. The man overboard recovery gear must be prepared prior to the transfer and the transfer point illuminated at night. It may be prudent for a second tug to provide a lee when boarding in rough sea conditions.

Preparations on the Vessel

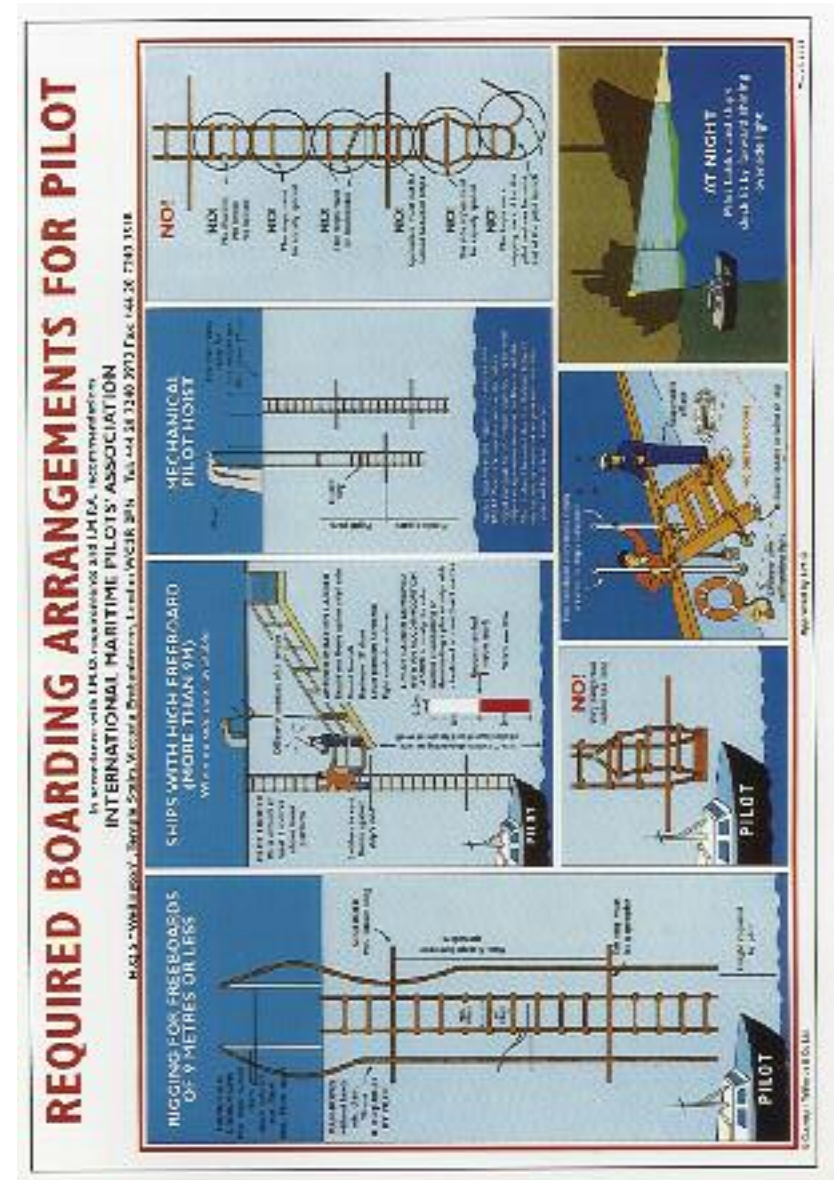
The vessel should make a good lee and be steady on course at a speed of about 6kts for the transfer. The transfer should not take place until the vessel has confirmed that it is ready to receive the tug alongside.

Pilot Transfer

The Tugmaster is responsible for making the decision as to whether the transfer should take place with regard to the weather conditions. When the tug is in position and the Tugmaster is satisfied that it is safe for the transfer to commence, he will indicate this readiness to Tug Deckhand. The Pilot should not step onto the pilot ladder until this has taken place. During the transfer only one person at a time should use the pilot ladder and any transfer of bags should be made by heaving line after the Pilot is clear of the ladder. The tug should maintain position until the transfer is complete. On completion of the transfer the tug should clear the vessel and then report to the Master that the transfer is complete and that the tug is clear.

ANNEX

International Marine Pilots Association – Required Boarding Arrangements for Pilot



REFERENCES

1. Code of Safe Practice The Embarkation and Disembarkation of
Pilots UKMPA August 2006
2. SOLAS Chapter V Regulation 17. *IMO London*

NOTES

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