

# Boarding and Landing of Pilots by Pilot Boat

## Code of Practice

This new version of the Code has been prepared jointly by the Marine / Pilotage Working Group of the BPA and the UK Major Ports Group. Although the same in most respects as the Code originally produced in 1991, there has been some updating, in particular the references to UK Legislation.

Its purpose is to act as a guide to safe practice and is commended to all those involved in the pilotage service. It covers not only the act of transfer from pilot boat to ship and vice versa, but also addresses issues such as the pilot boat itself, boarding and landing areas and training. It should be used primarily as a basis for safe operating procedures which are capable of being adapted to suit particular locations or type of operation.

The Code should complement the work that CHAs have carried out in connection with the Port Marine Safety Code and its Guide to Good Practice.

*[Revised 2002](#)*

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# 1 The Pilot Boat

- 1.1 The Competent Harbour Authority must ensure that the pilot boat on service, in all ways, meets the relevant requirements of the Merchant Shipping (Small Workboats and Pilot Boats) Regulations 1998 and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's "Code of Practice for the Safety of Small Workboats and Pilot Boats" currently undergoing revision and harmonisation (2002).
- 1.2 Prior to leaving the berth, and at least once per watch, the coxswain should ensure that his pilot boat is in all respects ready for sea. All openings (e.g. hatches, access to below-deck spaces and engine rooms) should be closed when under way and at sea.
- 1.3 On joining and prior to leaving a berth, the coxswain and crew should familiarise themselves with the positions and stowage of the safety equipment fitted to that particular pilot boat.
- 1.4 On joining in harbour or at sea, the pilot should also endeavour to familiarise himself with the positions and stowage of the safety equipment fitted to that particular pilot boat.
- 1.5 Because 1.4 above is not always easy when landing on a dark night, Pilots should ensure that they are familiar with the normal positions of stowage for such equipment on their pilot boat, or, where several different classes of pilot boat are in operation, the normal stowage for such equipment in that class of pilot boat.
- 1.6 Where appropriate, arrangements should be made for pilot boat mooring ropes to remain at the berth, in order to avoid accidental loss or accident while underway.
- 1.7 The decks of the pilot boat should be clear of all obstruction to the passage of pilot and crew.
- 1.8 An up-to-date and accurate log should be maintained.
- 1.9 Pilots should be careful, and in particular during periods of reduced visibility, not to impede the coxswain of the pilot boat in his navigation of the boat, for example by impeding his access to radar and use of the boat's VHF.

## **2 Leaving the Berth**

- 2.1 The pilot boat should not leave a berth unless in all respects ready for sea.
- 2.2 The pilot boat should be manned in compliance with Merchant Shipping Notice MGN 50 (M) dated December 1997.
- 2.3 The pilot boat should not operate outside the terms of its MCA pilot boat certificate.
- 2.4 Mooring ropes should be safely stowed. (See 1 .6)
- 2.5 Radio VHF communication with Port/Pilot Station should establish that the pilot boat is leaving berth on task, and has returned to berth on completion. Even where there is no practical need to do this in daylight/or otherwise clear visual contact with the pilot station, this practice is essential when the boat is operating in reduced/nil visibility.
- 2.6 All pilots and crew on the pilot boat should wear appropriate protective clothing and buoyancy equipment as approved by the CHA. A minimum standard has been established by the UKPA in its Recommendations on Pilots' Safety Clothing (1990) which is recommended as a guide, and Section 22.6 of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's Code of Practice refers, the 'Brown' Code: there are further references in the Harmonised Code (2202).

## **3 Boarding and Landing Areas**

- 3.1 CHAs should ensure that areas chosen for the boarding and landing of pilots have regard to sufficient sea-room for manoeuvre, depth of water and, where possible, shelter from the more exposed elements of predominant wind and weather.
- 3.2 Where possible, such areas should be clearly defined and marked on the appropriate charts.

## **4 On Approaching the Vessel**

- 4.1 VHF Radio contact should be established between the pilot boat and vessel as soon as possible on the channel established by the CHA for that purpose.
- 4.2 The position of the vessel should be established by the coxswain of the pilot boat and, where there is more than one vessel, their relative positions.
- 4.3 After consultation with the pilot, the pilot boat's coxswain, should advise on which side the vessel should rig her pilot ladder in order to give the best lee for his approach and communicate this information to the vessel. The decision on which side the pilot will board shall be agreed and communicated to the vessel as early as is practicable.
- 4.4 The pilot boat's coxswain should liaise with the vessel in order to make the best lee for safe transfer of a pilot, making due allowance for the close proximity of other vessels.
- 4.5 During the approach to the vessel, both pilot and assisting deckhand should remain inside the cabin until the pilot boat is at reduced speed and in the lee of the vessel.
- 4.6 At night the pilot boat deck lights should be turned on before anyone ventures on deck.
- 4.7 During final approach, the pilot boat searchlight should be turned on to illuminate the pilot ladder and fore-deck of the pilot boat. Care must be taken not to dazzle personnel on deck or adversely affect the night vision of persons on the bridge of the boarded vessel.
- 4.8 Particular caution should be taken with a vessel at anchor unable to manoeuvre to make a lee. She may need to be underway before embarking the pilot to provide a lee.
- 4.9 When boarding vessels with low freeboard, it may be more prudent to attempt boarding from the forward most part of the raised poop deck or from the after-most part of the focsle. In these cases a pilot ladder and ancillary equipment must be provided.
- 4.10 In adverse weather conditions where the risks to personnel and the launch may be too great, consideration must be given as to whether an attempt to board or land a pilot should be aborted.
- 4.11 The decision whether or not to place the pilot boat alongside the agreed location shall ultimately be the responsibility of the Coxswain.

## **5 The Vessel**

- 5.1 Upon establishing contact with the pilot station/pilot boat, the vessel should rig a pilot ladder or combination on the appropriate side as requested and in accordance with the International Convention for Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS 1974) Chapter V Reg 17 & IMO Resolution A667 (1991). These Regulations have been incorporated in the Merchant Shipping Act (Pilot Transfer Arrangements) Regulations 1999 and Merchant Shipping Notice MSN 1716.
- 5.2 During the transfer of pilot between pilot boat and vessel, the officer supervising the embarkation at the pilot ladder should be in direct contact with the bridge of the vessel. On large vessels, or when the embarkation point is not visible from the bridge, the communication should be by portable radio.
- 5.3 During the transfer the vessel should maintain steerageway with the engines going ahead and at a speed compatible with the ability of the launch to remain comfortably alongside.
- 5.4 The vessel should not be stopped in the water or her engines put astern, except in an emergency or when requested to do so by the pilot boat coxswain.
- 5.5 When boarding with a combination accommodation ladder/pilot ladder, the accommodation ladder must lead aft.
- 5.6 NB. Instances are still reported of the accommodation ladder facing forward due to the ship's construction; paragraphs 6.1/6.5/7.10 should be most carefully considered in these circumstances.
- 5.7 The accommodation ladder must be rigged sufficiently high to allow the pilot boat to lay alongside the pilot ladder section.

## **6 Pilot Boarding**

- 6.1 The decision whether or not to attempt to put a pilot boat alongside a vessel is the responsibility of the coxswain.
- 6.2 Any deckhand on deck and pilot should be wearing buoyancy aids as approved by the CHA. The pilot will wear protective-clothing and buoyancy equipment as defined in paragraph 2.6. In all cases, these are to be fastened in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
- 6.3 It is recommended that the deckhand should be secured to the pilot boat whilst on deck without restricting freedom of movement.
- 6.4 When leaving the cabin it is recommended that the deckhand, followed by the pilot, should pass along the outboard side of the cabin to the boarding position, which is normally the fore-deck of the pilot boat, in full view of the coxswain
- 6.5 In adverse weather conditions the risks associated with boarding a ship are heightened.
  - 6.5.1 In open waters the pilot and deckhand should proceed to the fore-deck before the pilot boat goes alongside but then only when the boat is in the lee of the vessel being served.
  - 6.5.2 In inshore waters, the pilot and deckhand should remain inside the cabin until the pilot boat is settled alongside the vessel.
  - 6.5.3 In either of the above cases (6.5.1 and 6.5.2) the coxswain will advise which method is to be used.
  - 6.5.4 In either case the pilot, when he has made the decision to board the vessel, must proceed with the deckhand via the outboard side of the pilot boat, attached, particularly in conditions where the boat is likely to move significantly either pitching, rolling, or both, to the Hadrian rail.
  - 6.5.5 In all cases the decision whether or not to board the vessel must be the responsibility of the pilot at the time.
- 6.6 Providing the ladder has been rigged at the correct height, the deckhand should lift the end clear as the pilot boat comes alongside. It is important that the ladder does not become trapped between vessel and pilot boat, causing damage and excessive strain on the ladder.
- 6.7 Where an adjustment to the height of the pilot ladder is required, this should be communicated to the bridge of the vessel by the coxswain and the pilot and deckhand recalled to the protection of the pilot boat cabin.
- 6.8 Before the pilot steps onto the ladder he should establish it is secure by communication with those at the top of the ladder. If there appears to be nobody on deck at the top of the ladder, the pilot should not attempt to embark.

- 6.9 The timing of stepping from pilot boat to ladder requires use of proven techniques e.g. using the top of the wave to step onto the ladder and the roll of the vessel to aid the ascent. If conditions are such that, in the estimation of the pilot a safe boarding cannot be effected, then the attempt should be abandoned.
- 6.10 When the pilot has a reasonably short climb, it is better for the pilot boat to remain alongside while the climb is completed to ensure the pilot boat does not foul the ladder when leaving the vessel's side.
- 6.11 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.
- 6.12 When boarding by hoists, a ladder must be rigged adjacent to the hoist and available for immediate use in the event of possible mechanical failure (MO Resolution A667, para.4.7.3.).
- 6.13 When boarding by hoist, the pilot should climb the flexible short pilot ladder into the rigid upper section before indicating that he is ready to be hoisted.
- 6.14 The pilot boat should move away from the vessel once the pilot enters the hoist 'cage'.

## **7 Pilot Landing**

- 7.1 As with boarding, communication should be established between vessel and pilot boat and arrangements made in advance.
- 7.2 Before leaving the bridge the pilot should obtain an assurance from the Master that the pilot ladder is properly secured.
- 7.3 The pilot should ensure, as far as practicable, that the pilot ladder is properly secured before disembarking.
- 7.4 The deckhand should be at the bottom of the ladder ensuring that the ladder is rigged at the correct height and clear (as in paragraph 6.6).
- 7.5 Before stepping onto the ladder the pilot should check that the pilot boat is lying alongside and has not fouled the pilot ladder.
- 7.6 During the descent the deckhand should advise the pilot how many steps further to go to the deck of the pilot boat. As the pilot is stepping from the ladder the deckhand is to be on hand to provide a timely warning of danger and to give physical assistance to the pilot if required.
- 7.7 Both pilot and deckhand should be wearing buoyancy aids as described in paragraph 6.2.
- 7.8 It is recommended (as in paragraph 6.3) that the deckhand should be secured to the pilot boat whilst on deck whenever possible.
- 7.9 It is recommended that the pilot should make his way to the cabin via the outboard side of the pilot boat. Once the deckhand has seen the pilot boat clear of the ladder, he should then also make his way to the cabin via the outboard side of the pilot boat.
- 7.10 While the decision whether or not to disembark from a vessel to the pilot cutter rests clearly with the pilot, the decision whether or not to attempt to put a pilot boat alongside a vessel is the responsibility of the coxswain.

## **8 Leaving the Vessel**

- 7.11 Before leaving the lee of the vessel the coxswain should ensure both pilot and deckhand are safely inside the pilot boat accommodation; a check should be made to ensure that the pilot boat has not fouled the ladder or the ship's gear in any way.
- 7.12 Should the pilot boat have difficulty leaving the side of the vessel, the coxswain should indicate his problem to the Master and request appropriate action to be taken.

## **9 Heavy Weather**

- 9.1 Pilot boats should proceed at a safe speed in heavy weather compatible with sea conditions and launch design.
- 9.2 In fast pilot boats maximum use should be made of the seating provided, together with seatbelts where fitted.
- 9.3 To avoid injury on passage, the stowage of ancillary equipment should be designed to be clear of seating areas, with particular emphasis on the space around head and shin.
- 9.4 Loose equipment or stores should not be carried unless properly stowed.
- 9.5 See also paragraphs 6.5 and 6.9 for boarding in heavy weather.

## **10 Poor Visibility**

- 10.1 The pilot boat must be allowed extra time on task in order to proceed at a safe speed in poor visibility.
- 10.2 In all cases where visibility or vision is impaired, the deckhand is to provide lookout until the vessel and its surroundings (e.g. mooring buoys) are clearly sighted by the coxswain, and conversely when leaving a vessel the coxswain will, as far as practicable, remain alongside the ship until the deckhand is in a position to provide lookout.
- 10.3 Pilot boat radar should be operational where fitted.
- 10.4 Pilot boat fog signal must be operational.
- 10.5 Ascertain, by radio contact with the ship being served, the ship's position, course and speed, and position relative to other vessels.
- 10.6 The coxswain should always approach round the stern and not across the ship's head.
- 10.7 See also paragraph 4.7 for approaching the vessel in poor visibility.

## **11 Man Overboard Procedure**

- 11.1 In the event of an "over the side" accident, the first essential is to locate the casualty and maintain him/her in sight; a task to which all crew and pilots on board must devote their whole attention.
- 11.2 Coastguard, port authorities and shipping should be informed as soon as possible, but long conversations must be avoided. Speed of sighting and recovery remain the priority.
- 11.3 Once found, and as the pilot boat is positioned, retrieval equipment can be prepared and deployed as appropriate.
- 11.4 Recovery should be made as per well practised drill. The method will depend on the equipment carried and the weather conditions.
- 11.5 Subsequent to an incident arising during the course of boarding and landing, a full report must be written and given to the Port Authority concerned.

## **12 Training for Retrieval of Casualties**

- 12.1 The success or failure of the rescue relates directly to the expertise of the pilot boat crew and pilots and their familiarity with recovery equipment, training in the treatment of hypothermia and artificial resuscitation.
- 12.2 Retrieval drill for pilot boat crews and check-listing of recovery equipment should be carried out on a regular basis to ensure a satisfactory level of competence with an appropriate log book entry.
- 12.3 Pilots should all be familiar with the recovery equipment of their pilot boats and during their initial training should receive actual "over the side" training.
- 12.4 All sea-going pilotage staff should receive training in resuscitation and the treatment of hypothermia to standards defined in MGN 50 (M) [formerly MI 473] or Basic Sea Survival Certificate.

This Code applies to ALL craft used for pilotage duties. Where craft other than purpose-built pilot boats and cutters are used (as in, for example, the case of tugs) allowance may need to be made where the design, operation or other characteristics of the craft preclude it from complying with particular recommendations listed in the Code. In such cases, CHA's will need to be satisfied that an equivalent standard is being reached.