



भारत सरकार / GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
पत्तन, पोत परिवहन और जलमार्ग मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF PORTS, SHIPPING AND WATERWAYS
समुद्रीय प्रशासन महानिदेशालय, मुंबई
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF MARITIME ADMINISTRATION, MUMBAI

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DGMA Circular No. 60 of 2026
Nautical Wing – Casualty Investigation Branch Circular No. 01 of 2026

Subject: Accident Release of Free-fall Lifeboat (FFLB) at sea

1. Overview

The Directorate General of Maritime Administration has investigated an incident involving the accidental release of a free-fall lifeboat (FFLB) at sea from a 28-year-old vessel while en route from Kochi to New Mangalore.

The incident occurred on 26 November 2025 at approximately 1330 hrs, in position 11°28.9' N / 075°16.5' E, when a crew member noticed that the vessel's FFLB was missing from its cradle.

The Master called an emergency muster, accounted for all hands, transmitted security messages, and informed the Indian Coast Guard and the Company.



Figure 1: General view of the vessel involved in the incident and Free fall lifeboat arrangement

The vessel turned around and the lifeboat was sighted in the water at 1430 hrs. It was recovered safely at 1653 hrs, and the vessel resumed passage at 1700 hrs after cancelling the security message and updating all concerned. No casualties, pollution or structural damage were reported.



Figure 2: *Stowage position of the FFLB. Left: the empty cradle after the release. Right: the FFLB as sighted in the water.*

FFLBs are critical life-saving appliances used for rapid evacuation in emergency situations. The integrity and proper functioning of their release and launching arrangements are therefore essential to their effectiveness.

The Directorate has therefore considered it appropriate to issue this Safety Advisory for the information of the maritime industry.

2. Causal Factors: Identification and Analysis

The fact-finding investigation revealed the following:

- (i) The primary cause was age-related deterioration of the release hook. The FFLB's release hook was found to be considerably thinner and corroded. A post-incident inspection report issued by the service station also confirms the same.
- (ii) This thinning resulted in loss of proper engagement between the hook and the holding cam, allowing the hook to slip free even while the cam remained in the locked position. Under normal operating conditions, release of the hook requires deliberate manual activation of the release mechanism by removing the interlocking pin.

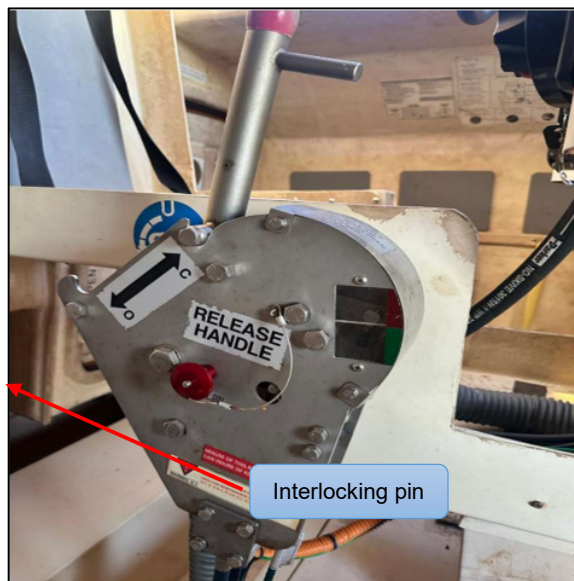


Figure 3: *Release Handle and interlocking pin arrangement*

- (iii) The bypass valve of the hydraulic unit was kept in the open position.¹ To activate the releasing piston, this bypass valve must also be closed.



Figure 4: *The FFLB in its stowed position on the launching arrangement, showing the securing arrangement.*

3. Conclusion

- (i) The FFLB was released due to a mechanical failure of the locking mechanism, rather than operational error.
- (ii) The release hook had corroded considerably and weakened as a result of ageing. Its surface area and structural integrity were so diminished that the holding cam was unable to retain it. The hook disengaged due to vessel vibration acting on the weakened contact surfaces.

4. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the investigation, the following measures are recommended:

- (i) Inspect the release hook and associated holding cam assembly, and repair or renew as necessary, in consultation with the lifeboat manufacturer and the classification society.
- (ii) Establish the service life of the hook and its cam in accordance with the manufacturer's instruction manual. Replace the hook mandatorily at the end of its specified service life, and include this requirement in the vessel's Planned Maintenance System (PMS).
- (iii) The Company has been advised to issue a "safety flash" to the vessels in its fleet that use this specific FFLB model, to check for similar corrosion or thinning of the release mechanism.
- (iv) Other companies are requested to circulate this advisory to their vessels.
- (v) Implement a monthly inspection of the hook and release arrangements by ship staff in the vessel's PMS, in accordance with the lifeboat manufacturer's maintenance manual. During the inspections, check for corrosion, deformation and any gap between the locking arm and the release hook. A gap may indicate incorrect resetting due to pressure remaining in the system.
- (vi) In addition to the weekly inspection, ensure that an annual thorough examination and operational test of the lifeboat release and retrieval system is carried out by the manufacturer or an authorised service provider using certified personnel.
- (vii) Shipping companies must obtain from the manufacturer detailed clearance/wear tables showing the difference between a healthy hook and one that has reached its "limit of wear", to enable better identification by the crew during routine inspections. Such guidance for the crew must be supported by photographs.

¹Under normal sailing conditions at sea, the hydraulic bypass valve is kept in the open position so that the line remains depressurised, to prevent accidental release. To launch the boat, this valve needs to be closed so that pressure can build up for release.

- (viii) Where a free-fall lifeboat has additional sea lashings or securing arrangements specified by the manufacturer:
- Check that the lashings are in good condition and that the quick-release/slip arrangement operates freely.
 - Avoid additional sea lashings unless they have a manufacturer/Class/Flag-approved quick-release system.
 - Ensure the lifeboat can be launched by two crew members within 5 minutes and is ready for immediate use.
 - Display clear release instructions at the point where such lashings are released.
 - Assign responsibility for removing the sea lashings in the muster list.
 - If sheathed wire lashings are fitted, inspect them regularly through the PMS for signs of water ingress and corrosion.

5. Regulatory Requirements

- (i) Attention is drawn to the requirements of SOLAS Regulation III/20 and IMO Resolution MSC.402(96) concerning the maintenance, thorough examination, operational testing, overhaul and repair of lifeboats and launching appliances.
- (ii) In particular, section 4.2 of IMO Resolution MSC.402(96) requires that the annual thorough examination and operational testing of lifeboat release and retrieval systems be carried out by the manufacturer or an authorised service provider using certified personnel.
- (iii) Shipowners and operators are advised to ensure compliance with these requirements and to maintain proper records of such inspection and testing.

6. Advisory

- (i) All shipowners, managers, masters, recognised organisations and service providers are advised to take note of the above findings and recommendations, and to ensure that lifeboat release mechanisms and associated launching arrangements on board vessels under their management are maintained, inspected and tested in accordance with applicable statutory requirements and the manufacturer's instructions.
- (ii) Investigations of accidental release of lifeboats during drills, inspection and maintenance have highlighted the risk associated with personnel being inside free-fall lifeboats supported by slings, cradle or ramp arrangements. All stakeholders are advised to follow the manufacturer's instructions which indicate that, where a free-fall lifeboat is not fitted with an independent securing or restraining arrangement in the stowed condition, additional securing arrangements may be used during inspection, maintenance or personnel entry to prevent inadvertent release, in accordance with the manufacturer's operating and maintenance instruction manuals.



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To,
All stakeholders through the DGS Website
Ship Owners / Ship Operators / Ship Managers / Ship Masters