Death of seafarer due to fall from crane cabin

Safety Flash Published on **15 April 2026** Generated on **15 April 2026** IMCA SF 07/26

The Directorate General of Shipping (DGS) of India published Circular 04-2025 relating to an incident in which a seafarer took a fatal fall from a crane cabin.

IOGP Life Saving Rules:

- Bypassing safety controls
- Working at height

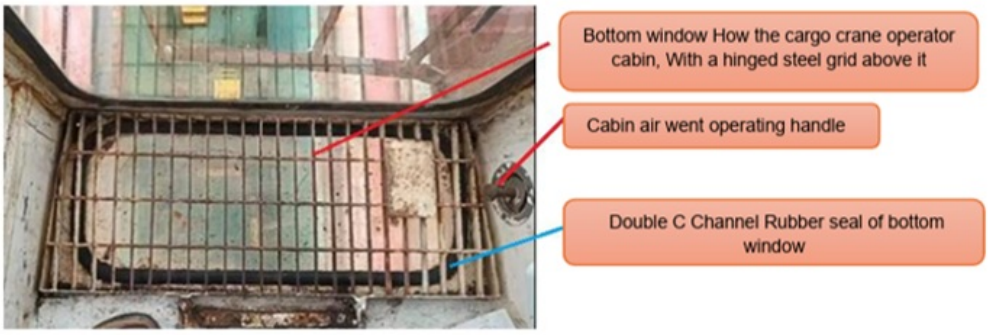
What happened?

On a vessel at anchor awaiting berthing instructions, two crew members were tasked with cleaning the interiors of the cargo crane cabins, which required maintenance after recent cargo operations. About 30 minutes into the work, one of the seafarers fell 12m from the cabin of one of the cargo cranes to the deck below. The seafarer was fatally injured by the fall.

There was no evidence that fatigue, substance use, or adverse weather played a role in the incident.

Immediate cause

The safety investigation determined that the most probable cause of the fall was the failure of the sealing mechanism of the bottom window in the cabin of the cargo crane. The crew member fell through the bottom window, which gave under their weight.



Contributory factors (Directorate General of Shipping)

- Grating Removal: The protective steel grating over the window was removed to access the glass for cleaning due to a seized cabin air vent handle. Normally, the grating is swung out to clean the glass, but due to the obstruction from seized air vent handle, the seafarer had to remove it completely, leaving the fragile glass exposed.
- The glass pane and rubber seal were not designed to support any weight. Also, the glass may have been previously weakened.

- Seal Failure: The rubber seal (double C-channel type) possibly failed under weight of the seafarer.
- Corrosion: Thinning of metal around the window frame may have weakened the structure.
- There was no fall arrest nor PPE used.
- There were no safety barriers:
  - No physical guard remained after grating was removed.
  - No alarms or interlocks to prevent or warn against barrier removal.
  - No warning signs to alert the seafarer to the hazard.

Lessons learned

- Routine Task Risk: Familiar tasks can lead to complacency. Hazards in routine jobs are often underestimated, highlighting the need for vigilant risk assessments.
- Barrier Integrity: The removal of physical protections (like gratings) can expose hidden risks. Such components must be treated as critical safety barriers.
- Structural Inspections: Equipment such as window assemblies and sealing mechanisms can deteriorate over time and should be regularly inspected to prevent structural failure.
- Training on Equipment Hazards: Lack of awareness about equipment limitations (e.g., glass not designed to bear weight) can result in incidents.
- Use of Safety Signage: Absence of visual warnings may cause workers to overlook hazards. Clear signage could have reinforced awareness.
- A proactive Safety Culture: Unsafe conditions often go unnoticed when safety practices are reactive. A proactive approach to inspections and hazard identification is essential.