

Mooring rope caught in stern thruster

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Confusion whilst unmooring as it was being prepared for departure from port, led to mooring ropes being caught in the stern thruster.

IOGP Life Saving Rules:



Work authorisation

What happened?

A vessel was preparing to depart with a pilot onboard. Local traffic control instructed the Pilot that the vessel must remain alongside until another vessel departed and passed astern, and that the vessel was not permitted to use thrusters until the passing vessel was clear.

The Pilot advised the Master to “start with the stern ropes first,” which the Master relayed to the deck crew. This wording was interpreted as an action command, rather than an instruction to prepare, resulting in the unintended release of both stern lines by the deck crew. Critically, the aft spring was already taken onboard, unnoticed from the bridge due to the aft capstan winch location and blind spot. Although the forward spring remained in place, it was later assessed that it had not been properly adjusted / tensioned, allowing the vessel to surge ahead when the stern lines were released.

With only forward lines restraining the vessel and a significant river current acting as a wedge between the stern and the quay, the vessel began moving toward another berth. The Master applied astern propulsion and lateral thrusters to regain control. During this manoeuvring, deck crew reported that a rope had gone under the stern.

Why did it happen?

- Miscommunication: An ambiguous mooring instruction was interpreted as an immediate release order, leading to premature letting go of stern lines.
- Loss of situational awareness due to blind spots and no verification of spring-line status.
- Bridge Resource Management (BRM) failure, including the lack of closed loop communication and assumption of shared understanding.
- Overreliance on informal phraseology, instead of standardised mooring commands.

What are the lessons?

- **Closed-loop communication:** This is vital especially for mooring – ensure everyone clearly understands what is happening; repeat

instructions back and get confirmation that this is exactly what you need to be doing. Assume nothing!

- A correctly tensioned forward spring is critical to controlling vessel movement.
- Don't underestimate the effects of current, weather, and visibility during vessel manoeuvring operations.



Bridge view - Capstan winch located inside crash rail

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