

LIGHTENING HOLE MISSTEP

The Story

Several years ago on a Chevron VLCC, the chief officer fell through a lightening hole in the upper platform deck of the forepeak while inspecting the progress of a rust and sediment clean-up job. He fell to the second platform, 24 feet below, and suffered very serious injuries.

How could such an accident happen?

As none of the other men working in the forepeak actually witnessed the accident, and the mate is unable to recollect his own actions, we have only circumstantial facts to determine the cause:

1. The mate was a careful, experienced officer; young and in good health, with excellent eyesight.
2. He was familiar with the layout of the forepeak and knew that there were openings in the platform decks.
3. The forepeak was thoroughly ventilated and the atmosphere was tested to confirm normal oxygen and hydrocarbon vapor before the crew entered.
4. Three portable tank lights were rigged to light the work areas; and the mate carried a flashlight.
5. The platform surface was level, with no obstructions or loose gear to cause the mate to trip.
6. The deck plating was roughened by rust and not slippery; and the mate was wearing stout work shoes with nonslip soles.
7. There were no overhead obstructions.

Given these circumstances, the most likely explanation for the mate's misstep is that it was the result of a momentary lapse in his attention to where he was walking, combined with less than perfect illumination.

Lesson Learned

There are many work locations and many work occasions aboard ship where a slip, trip, or mistep can lead to an injurious fall. Your best safeguard against such an accident happening to you, is your own alertness and caution.

Whenever your work takes you in and around tanks, cofferdams, and void spaces remind yourself to be apprehensive. Be suspicious of the walking surfaces, the climbing steps and platforms, the ladder rungs and hand holds. Test them before you trust your full weight on them. Use a good flashlight wherever lighting is poor. Watch ahead for slippery spots, loose scale, tripping hazards, and unguarded openings. Above all, keep aware that you are in an area not designed for routine work or traffic.

Prevention Through People



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