

LOCAL VESSELS SAFETY BULLETIN NO. 02/2026

SAFE TOWING AND MOORING OPERATION

17 August 2026

To: Shipowners, Operators, Agents, Coxswains, Engine Operators,
and Crew of Hong Kong Local Vessels

WHAT HAPPENED

A fatal accident occurred aboard a local dumb lighter while under tow near the West Kowloon Cultural District. A worker was struck by the starboard towline after its fairlead roller assembly failed and detached from the deck. The investigation revealed that the base plate of the fairlead was deformed, corroded, and had welding failures, evidenced lack of maintenance and inspection. The vessel was also operating without a valid Certificate of Survey (CoS) at the time of the accident. Tragically, the worker, who was positioned in the mooring deck, a high-risk snap-back zone of the towline in operation, sustained fatal injuries.

LESSONS LEARNT AND URGENT ACTIONS

To prevent a recurrence, the following measures must be strictly implemented by all concerned parties:

1. Ensure Vessel Certification and Structural Integrity

- Maintain a valid CoS as required for operation. Operation without a valid certificate is a breach of regulations.
- Conduct thorough and regular inspections of all towing and mooring equipment, with special attention to towline, fairleads, rollers, bitts, and their supporting structures (deck welds and base plates) for signs of corrosion, wear, cracking, or deformation.
- Ensure all load-bearing equipment are constantly inspected and maintained. Repair or replace defective equipment immediately to ensure the vessel is fit for the intended service and in good condition. Physical test should be conducted periodically and every time after repairs or renewal of load bearing structural components.

2. Manage Risks for Mooring Operation

- **Risk Assessment**

Before commencing any mooring operation, a comprehensive risk assessment must be conducted to identify potential hazards associated with mooring lines, equipment, and sea conditions.

- **Snap-Back Zone Awareness**

Do not mark specific snap-back zones on the mooring deck. One of the reasons is the unpredictability of the snapback distance from mooring line. Instead, treat the entire mooring area as a potential danger zone to avoid creating a false sense of security.

- **Communication**

Conduct pre-operation briefing to ensure that all personnel involved are aware of the hazards identified, the operation plan, responsibilities, and safety measures. Ensure all personnel have means to communicate throughout the operation.

- **Training**

Provide training to all personnel on the dangers in the snapback zone, emphasizing the need to maintain a safe distance from mooring lines at all times.

3. Other Measures

- Wearing proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), pre-operation checking, emergency procedures, etc. should also be in place.

Towing and mooring risks persist even in calm weather conditions. All crew members must always strictly adhere to established safety procedures and guidelines, irrespective of vessel size or operational familiarity, to prevent incidents occurs.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT SECTION

MARINE DEPARTMENT

GOVERNMENT OF THE HKSAR