



## High Value Learning

Fall from height during transfer and delayed rescue due to medical fitness and recovery limitations

### Who could be interested in this?

- Marine and offshore personnel involved in transfer operations
- Vessel crews and marine coordinators
- Offshore installation and windfarm personnel
- Occupational health professionals
- Safety advisors and duty holders responsible for fitness-to-work standards

### What is this all about?

The Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) have released [Accident Report 2/2026 Very serious Marine Casualty](#).

The report is on a fatal incident which occurred during a personnel transfer when an individual fell from a pilot ladder while boarding a vessel at sea.

The individual sustained injuries during the fall and entered cold water. Although recovered alongside the vessel, they remained partially immersed due to failure of recovery equipment and were not fully rescued for over 40 minutes. The individual later died.

The investigation found that it was probable the individual experienced a sudden medical event during the climb, resulting in loss of grip and fall. Subsequent immersion in cold water, combined with delayed recovery and limited first aid intervention, significantly reduced the chance of survival.

This incident highlights the combined risk of:

- Working at height during transfers
- Potential for sudden medical incapacity
- Limitations in rescue and recovery systems
- Environmental exposure (cold water immersion)
- The weight of an individual can hamper rescue and recovery

Further findings identified that:

- The individual had underlying health conditions that should have affected their fitness for duty but were not fully assessed during the medical certification process.
- There was no defined occupational health standard aligned to the physical demands of the role (e.g. climbing ladders)
- Personnel were unable to prevent the task proceeding despite concerns about the individual's fitness (stop-work ineffective)
- Recovery equipment failed under load and no secondary recovery method was available
- Prolonged exposure to cold water significantly reduced survivability

People can become incapacitated without warning. If rescue systems, medical assurance, and stop-work controls are not robust, a survivable incident can quickly become fatal.

This demonstrates that fitness for task, rescue capability, and emergency preparedness must be treated as critical safety barriers—not assumptions.



## Some things to consider.

- Be aware that despite medical certification individuals should still consider fitness for task, including and physical capability and health on that day (e.g. climbing, working at height).
- Consider how your organisation ensures that individuals with known or suspected health concerns are prevented from undertaking safety-critical work where this may increase risk.
- Consider the effectiveness of stop-work authority, particularly in situations that are not clearly safety but may include a workers health or mental health for a given day or task.
- Consider whether recovery systems are:
  - o Fully functional under realistic load conditions
  - o Treated as safety-critical equipment
  - o Supported by independent secondary recovery methods
- Consider the time taken to recover a casualty from the water and whether delays would significantly affect survival in your operating environment.
- Consider the effects of cold-water immersion and whether PPE provides adequate protection for realistic rescue timelines.
- Consider whether transfer procedures and vessel positioning minimise the consequence of a fall (e.g. avoiding hard impact surfaces).
- Consider the training and competence of personnel in:
  - o Emergency response
  - o Casualty recovery
  - o First aid and CPR
  - o Managing hypothermia and immersion-related risks

Distributed on 27/05/2026

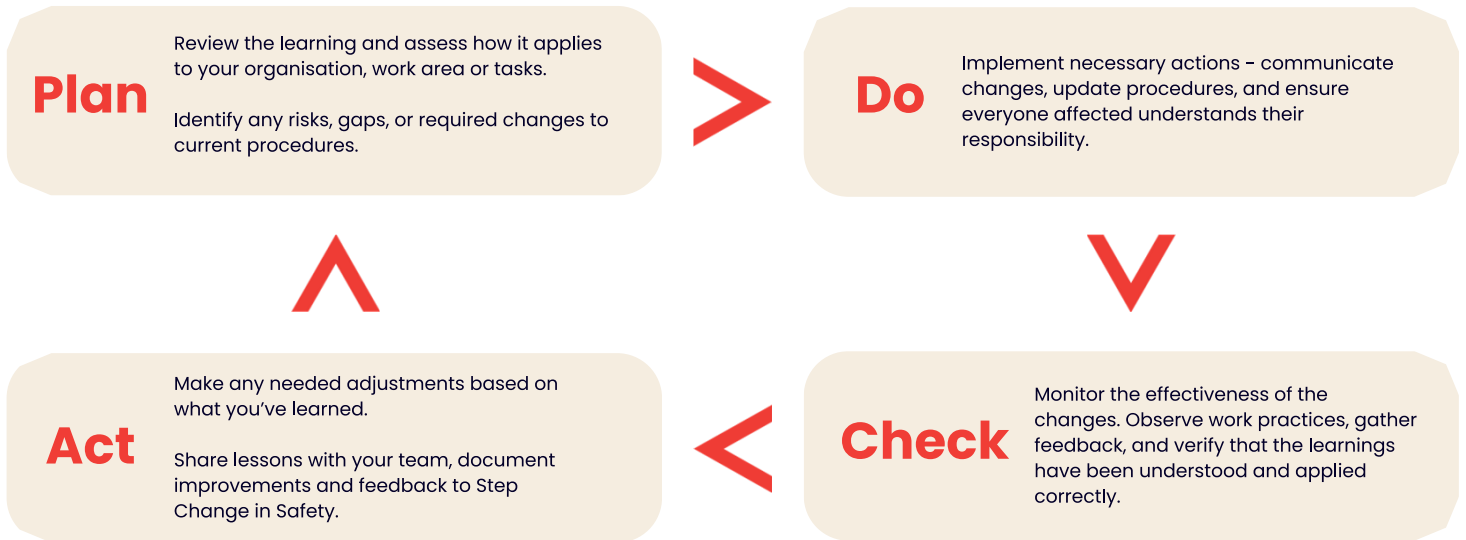
This document is provided for information only and any considerations provided are non-exhaustive and fact dependent. It should not be considered as advice or as providing any recommendation and it is for the recipient to decide what action may be warranted in response to the content and to make its own assessments and decisions in respect of its own operations and circumstances. All liability and responsibility for any information provided is excluded to the fullest extent permitted under law.



## Verification of learnings shared and feedback method

## High Value Learning

To ensure this learning leads to meaningful improvement, follow the **Plan Do Check Act** process and **provide your feedback to Step Change in Safety**.



**Share your learnings and feedback via the [Resource Feedback form](#).**

**Your proactive engagement helps create a safer workplace for everyone.**



Feedback Form