Pilot Transfer Arrangements — study guide

Pilot transfer is one of the most dangerous routine evolutions at sea: it happens at the ship's side, often in poor weather, over water. This guide covers the pilot's role, the ladder and the safety arrangements.[1][2]

The pilot's role

Pilots are **certified** and highly trained to safely assist a ship on its passage. Their knowledge of local areas is valuable when **navigation** may be considered hazardous or when a shipmaster is unfamiliar with the relevant port or area. Pilots are also equipped with an understanding of local languages and **dialects**, which assists communication. **Pilotage** refers to activities related to the navigation of vessels in which the pilot acts as an **adviser to the Master** and as an expert on the local waters and their navigation.

The pilot ladder

Pilot ladders over **30 months** of age must have a certificate of strength testing as per **ISO 799**. After a long sea passage, the pilot ladder and associated equipment should be inspected so there is time to repair or make further checks if needed.

Inspecting the equipment

When inspecting pilot transfer equipment, look for damage, wear and twists to any of the ropes (including the manropes), broken or damaged chocks, and broken or damaged steps or spreaders.

Safety arrangements during transfer

For the pilot moving on and off the ladder: the heaving line should be available to assist the pilot if they have a bag or equipment; a lifebuoy with a self-igniting light should be placed near the ladder; and a responsible officer must be in constant communication with the bridge, relaying pilot movements (to confirm they are safely on board or off board) and communicating instructions from the pilot or the Master.

Key facts to remember

- Pilots are certified experts on local waters; they advise the Master and know local languages and dialects.
- Pilot ladders over 30 months old need a strength-test certificate per ISO 799.
- Inspect after long passages: ropes/manropes (damage, wear, twists), chocks, steps and spreaders.
- During transfer: heaving line ready, lifebuoy with self-igniting light near the ladder, responsible officer in constant bridge communication.

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Sources

1. IMO Resolution A.1045(27) — Pilot transfer arrangements (ladder construction, rigging and safety equipment).

2. ISO 799-1 — Ships and marine technology — Pilot ladders (specification and strength testing).