

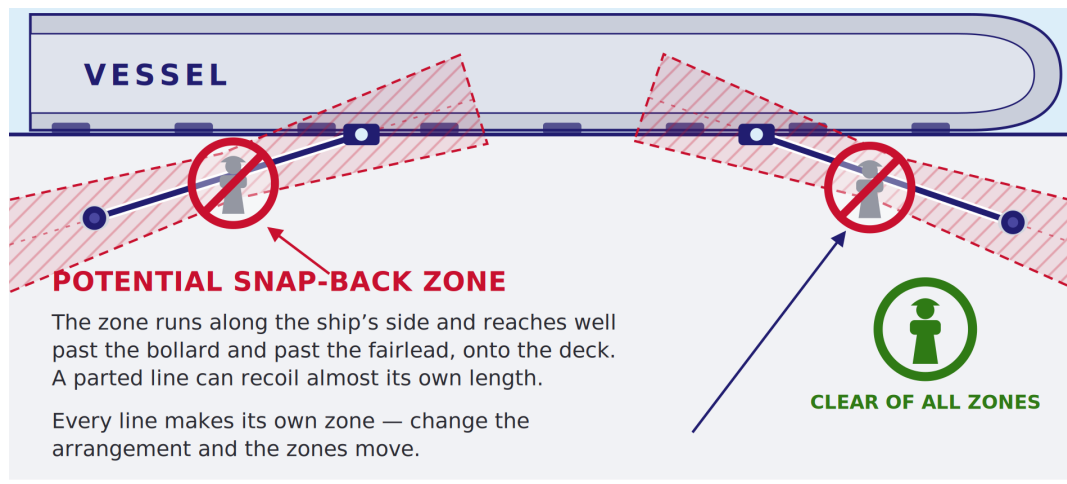
POPL SAFETY ALERT

Snap-Back Zones — Stay Clear, Stay Safe

Date issued	04 th Sep 2026
Issued by	Port of Portland — Health, Safety & Environment
Applies to	All port users: vessel masters and crew, linesmen, stevedores, contractors, service providers and POPL personnel
Action required	Brief this alert at your next toolbox talk and pre-arrival meeting, and display it on site noticeboards.

A mooring line under tension stores an enormous amount of energy. If the line parts, that energy is released in an instant: the line recoils along its own length and whips sideways at every fairlead, roller and bollard it passes through. It happens faster than anyone can react, and it gives no warning. Mooring line failures kill and maim people in ports around the world every year.

This alert is a general reminder to all port users. Mooring is routine work, and routine is exactly when this hazard is underestimated.



PLAN VIEW OF A MOORED VESSEL

-  Potential snap-back zone — keep out whenever lines are fast or being worked
-  Mooring line under tension
-  Bollard / fairlead — a change of lead adds sideways whip

Figure 1 — Snap-back zones at a moored vessel. Each line creates its own zone, and the zone extends well beyond the bollard and the fairlead.

The four things everyone needs to know

- You cannot see stored energy.** A line that looks slack can come up tight in seconds with tide, swell, passing vessels, cargo and ballast operations or winch movement.
- It travels a long way.** A parted line can recoil a distance approaching its own length, at a speed no person can move out of.



- **It does not only go backwards.** At a fairlead, bollard or roller the line whips sideways. The danger area is a fan, not a straight line.
- **The zones move.** Change the vessel, the berth, the line lead or the number of lines and every zone changes with them.

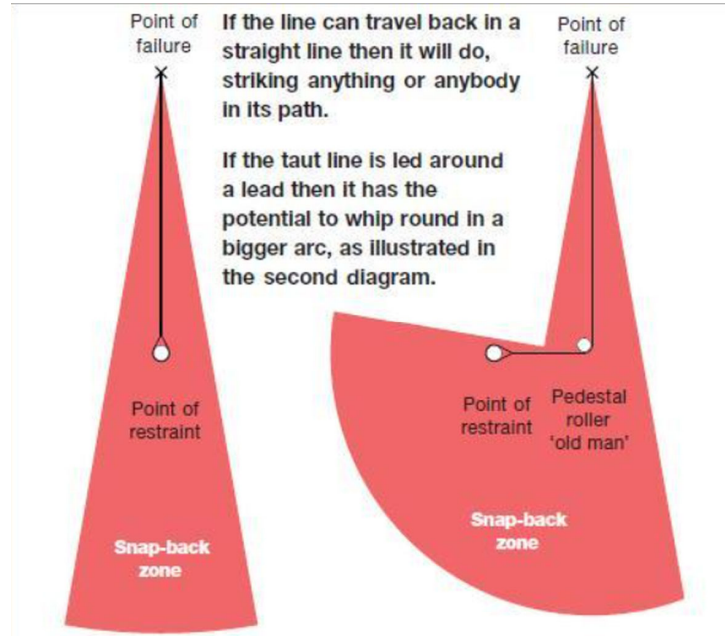
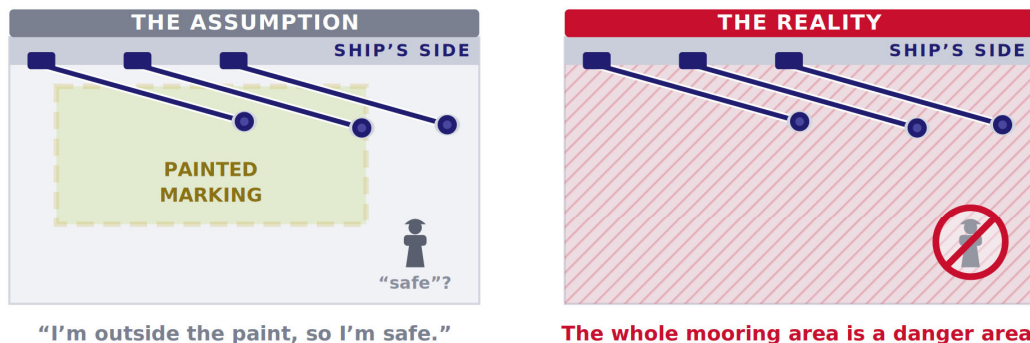


Figure 2 — Estimating snap-back zones. A line that can travel back in a straight line will do so. A line led around a fairlead or pedestal roller whips round in a far wider arc. Source: MCA Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers.

Painted markings are not the snap-back zone

Painted markings on ships' decks and on the wharf show one simplified scenario. They do not show the real, changing danger area, and standing just outside the paint does not mean you are clear. Current industry guidance is to treat the entire mooring area as a potential snap-back zone whenever lines are fast or being worked — and to stay out of it unless you have a reason to be there.



Painted markings do not show the real snap-back zone. Do not rely on them.

Figure 3 — Do not use painted markings to decide where it is safe to stand.

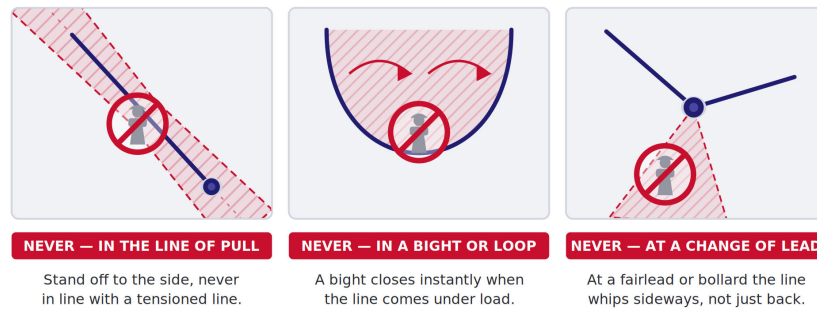


Figure 4 — Three positions to never take up around a tensioned line.

Boarding and disembarking — gangway access

The gangway lands inside the mooring area. On most vessels the accommodation is aft, so the gangway comes down among the after springs and breast lines, with the head lines and forward springs leading away in the opposite direction. Those lines often pass within a few metres of the access route and frequently at chest height, and they are hardest to see at night and in rain.

Everyone who boards or leaves a vessel passes through that area — crew, agents, surveyors, stevedores, contractors and visitors. Most are not part of the mooring team and are not at the toolbox talk; many arrive alone, at any hour, and are carrying something, on the phone or thinking about the job ahead. The lines also do not stay as you left them: while the vessel works cargo or ranges with the tide they are heaved, slackened and re-tended, so a line that was slack when you boarded can be bar-tight when you come back down. Never duck under or step over a line to shorten the walk, never let vehicles or waiting groups gather at the foot of the gangway, and treat the walk to and from the gangway as part of the mooring area, not as a car park.

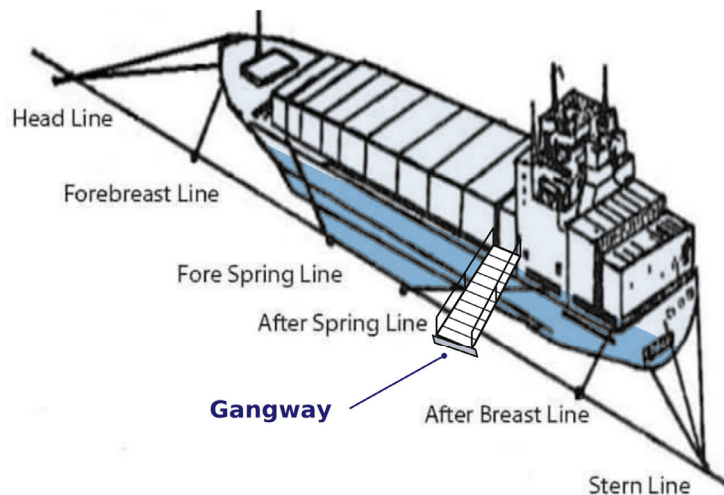


Figure 5 — Typical mooring arrangement, with the gangway landed between the fore and after spring lines. Everyone boarding or leaving the vessel passes through the mooring area.

Key controls

Everyone working on or near the wharf

- Treat every mooring line as tensioned, even when it looks slack.
- Stay out of the mooring area while lines are being run, tensioned or let go. No role, no reason to be there.
- Never stand in line with a tensioned line, inside a bight or loop, or on the outside of a bend at a fairlead or bollard.
- Never step over, sit on, lean against or stand on a mooring line.
- Position yourself where you can see the whole line and have a clear escape route.
- If you must cross the area, look along every line first and keep moving. Where possible, park your vehicle clear of the mooring lines of the vessel.
- **Boarding or leaving a vessel:** Before embarking or disembarking the vessel, identify every line near the access route. Do not stop, wait or gather at the foot of the gangway, and leave the area by the shortest route.

Before the job — mooring crews, supervisors and vessel masters

- Identify the snap-back zones for the actual mooring arrangement at the pre-start or toolbox talk. Walk the area and point them out.
- Agree communications and a stop-work signal between the vessel, linesmen and shore personnel before the first line goes ashore.
- Inspect lines, tails, shackles, thimbles, splices, fairleads, bollards, rollers and winch brakes for wear, chafe, glazing, cuts and deformation. Most failures start at an eye, a splice or a chafe point.
- Keep non-essential personnel and vehicles outside the mooring area.

During the job

- Make tension changes slowly and communicate them. Do not heave or surge against a line that is already fast.
- Watch for changes in tide, swell, wind, passing-vessel effects and cargo or ballast operations — they all change line loads.
- Suspend gangway movements while lines are being run, tensioned or let go, and tell anyone waiting to board or land to stand clear until the operation is finished.
- Stop work immediately if a line is rendering, smoking, making noise, looks overloaded or damaged, if communication is lost, or if conditions change.

Report it

Report all incidents and near-misses — including parted or damaged lines where no one was hurt — to the POPL Harbour Master and Health, Safety & Environment team at safety@portofportland.com.au.

**You cannot see stored energy.
You will not outrun it. Stay out of the snap-back zone.**