

October 12, 2021

Mr Joe Cressy, Councillor, Ward 10

Dear Joe:

**Re: Unsafe Dock Walls at Toronto Harbour**

Over the weekend I was interviewed on City News about safety concerns in Toronto Harbour, due the lack of fixed safety ladders up the dock walls:

<https://toronto.citynews.ca/video/2021/10/10/life-saving-measures-lacking-along-waterfront-kayaker/>

The dock walls can be six feet high. About half the year, the water is cold enough to kill a person in the water in a few minutes.

Although the Waterfront has become one of the City's most popular destinations, and is often thronged with pedestrians, there are no fixed ladders up the dock wall in many places.



Where ladders do exist they are sometimes in such poor repair that they are no use.



As a kayaker and resident of the waterfront, I'm on or around the water a lot. I've seen several people unexpectedly in the water in danger of drowning due to the lack of a built-in safety ladder up the dock wall. Some examples:

A man (seemingly a visitor from some warmer country) dove off the sea wall in the Western Gap, not realizing how cold the water was. He couldn't climb out. There was no hook, lifebuoy or portable ladder nearby. He would have drowned but luckily for him some kayakers including me happened to come by just in time, by sheer chance.

A senior citizen who appeared to be a first-time kayaker without rescue training capsized in the Eastern Gap. He was unable climb up the dock wall on the east side. A passing sailboat was picking him up by the time I got there to help. He was lucky there were boaters nearby. There might not have been.

Two weeks ago, a possibly mentally disturbed man, seemingly a non-swimmer, was beaten up by four men on Queens Quay at Yonge Street and tossed into the water. His assailants ran off, leaving him floating on his back semi-conscious. The

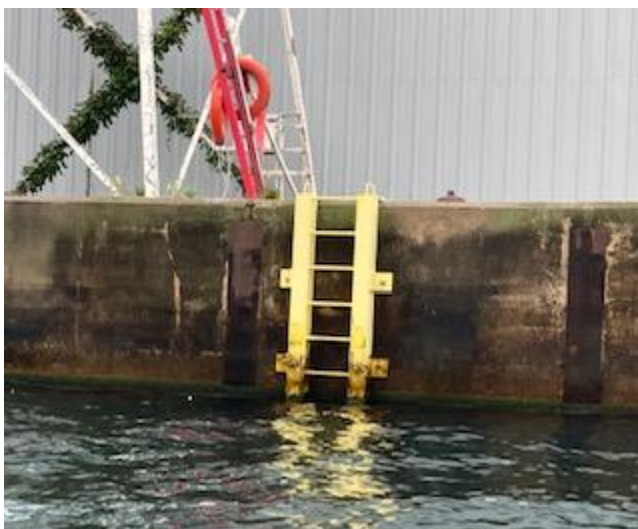
hook, lifebuoy and portable ladder that should have been hanging nearby weren't there, perhaps stolen. From the sidewalk, I yelled at him to kick his feet a bit; he barely made it to a nearby docked boat, where I pulled him out.

It's not hard to imagine situations where drunks, skateboarders, the blind, kids, senior citizens, people with mental health issues and so on, somehow end up in the water. To compound the problem, the safety railings in some places are very low or completely absent (for example, along the sea wall outside the National Yacht Club at the Western Gap.)

The City has set up many "safety stations", consisting of a lifebuoy, rescue hook and portable ladder, along the waterfront. These are welcome, but they aren't enough. In none of the incidents described above were they any help. Sometimes they're too far away. The safety items may be stolen or vandalized. They're no use if there's no one on land nearby to help.

Ownership of the harbour walls is varied. Sometimes jurisdiction is unclear. This seems to have contributed to the problem.

In some places, there are excellent sturdy safety ladders, built to withstand ice, painted bright yellow. For example, safety ladders were recently installed by Ports Toronto on the south side of the Eastern Gap, ironically in an area where there are few pedestrians. The dock walls on the south east end of the Western Gap near the malting towers now have good safety ladders, recently installed as part of the Bathurst Quay Neighbourhood Plan.



But in other places, built-in safety ladders are nowhere to be found for hundreds of metres, for example, around the Pier 27 condominiums just east of Yonge, where the City News item was shot.

I recommend an audit of the sea walls, and that fixed safety ladders be installed where necessary. As a rule of thumb, I suggest they be no more than 40 metres apart.

I'm happy to discuss this further.

Regards,

Ed Hore  
Barrister & Solicitor

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