

Hook, Line, and Danger

Tests show plain snap hooks can open accidentally.



The International Sailing Federation (ISAF) Regulations Governing Offshore and Oceanic Equipment and Preparation, Rule 5.02.1, warns, "It is possible for a plain snap hook to disengage from a U-bolt, if the hook is rotated under load at right angles to the axis of the U-bolt. For this reason the use of snap hooks with positive locking devices is strongly recommended."

PS staff tested this admonition of accidental opening (photos at left) on the West Marine snap hook, and came away true believers. The problem is the snap hook/carabiner spring action gate. As the gate rests against the bale of a padeye or U-bolt, the load presses the gate open. When even a light strain is put on the tether, the snap hook pops off the padeye.

Some tether makers have recognized the problem and use an asymmetrical snap hook in the belief that accidental unhooking is less likely to occur because the asymmetrical snap hook doesn't naturally want to lay in the dangerous position.

However, testers concluded accidental opening can readily occur with any snap hook/carabiner without a locking device.