

Companion to the 4.16 Memorial Park  
International Design Competition Guidelines:  
Suggestions from Citizens,  
Appendix 1\_Overview and Significance of the Sewol Ferry Disaster

## Overview of the Sewol Ferry Disaster

At around 9:00 PM on April 15, 2014, MV Sewol departed from the Port of Incheon, with a total of 476 people on board: 447 passengers (including 325 sophomore students and 15 teachers from Danwon High School in Ansan) and 29 crewmembers. At around 8:25 AM the following day, as the ferry was crossing the Maenggol Channel, about 1.8 miles north of Byeongpung Island in Jindo County, the hull of the ship abruptly tilted 30 degrees to the port side. MV Sewol was left adrift because of this irreversible tilt, which increased to 108.1 degrees by 10:17 AM. By 11:18 AM, the ferry was completely capsized, except for part of the bow.

A total of 172 people survived by escaping or climbing onto the deck soon after the ferry began to tilt. The other 304 people onboard lost their lives, including 5 people whose remains have never been recovered. Of the 304 casualties, 250 were students from Danwon High School, meaning that almost 80% of the students died.

On the day of the incident, the Jindo Vessel Traffic Service Center (VTS), which is responsible for managing maritime traffic in this area, was nowhere to be found until they were notified about the incident through the Mokpo Coast Guard at 9:06 AM. The first authorities to be notified about the incident were the Mokpo Coast Guard and Western Regional Coast Guard, both of which were very slow in their initial response. Their failure to relay the report through the proper channels prevented the Commander of the Western Regional Coast Guard from taking appropriate measures, such as ordering the ship to be evacuated.

The first boat to arrive on the scene was Mokpo Coast Guard Vessel 123 at around 9:35 AM, approximately 40 minutes after the incident had first been reported. However, instead of rescuing passengers from the stern of the ferry, the Coast Guard personnel first rescued crewmembers from the steering house near the bow. By the time Coast Guard Vessel 123 and a rescue helicopter arrived, MV Sewol had tilted by 52.5 degrees, but most of the passengers were still below deck. At that point, they could have come above deck to await rescue, but Vessel 123 did not issue any evacuation order whatsoever. At 8:58 AM, the Coast Guard ordered the dispatch of a special unit for a diving mission, but this team of seven did not have a helicopter or other special means of transport to reach the site of the sinking. By the time they finally arrived on a private fishing boat at 11:15 AM, the entire hull except for the bow was submerged.

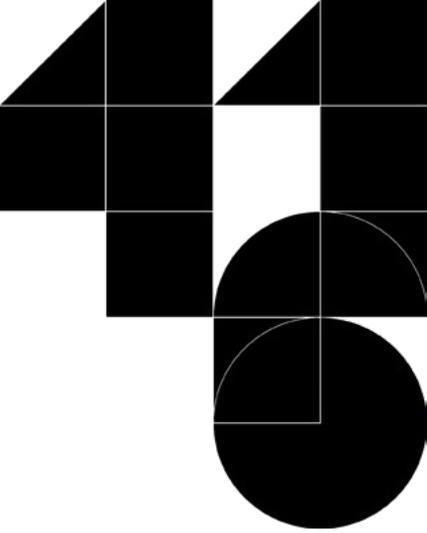
By 10:10 AM, the ferry had tilted by nearly 90 degrees, such that the doorways were elevated into the position of the ceiling. Even so, the captain of the ferry and crewmembers repeatedly used the intercom to order the passengers to “stay put” (i.e., below deck), and the Coast Guard personnel on site did not issue any evacuation orders. Eventually, all of the crewmembers were rescued and brought onboard Coast Guard Vessel 123, leaving no authorities on the ferry to issue an evacuation order. At 11:18 AM, almost three hours after the ship began to capsize, MV Sewol was completely submerged, with only part of its bow above water.

As mentioned, 172 people survived by leaving the cabins early to take refuge on the deck, but the majority of students and other passengers were abandoned in their cabins with direct orders from the crew to “stay put” until it was too late to rescue them. As a direct result of these shockingly negligent actions, 304 of the 476 passengers died.

On October 28, 197 days after the Sewol Ferry Disaster, the search team found the 295th missing passenger. Due to concerns for the divers’ safety, the families of the missing passengers authorized the suspension of search operations on November 11. The Pan-governmental Countermeasures Headquarters officially disbanded on November 18.<sup>1)</sup>

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1 This outline is based on information from the Korean Bar Association’s White Paper on the 4.16 Sewol Ferry Disaster.



## Confirmed Facts About the Sewol Ferry Disaster <sup>2)</sup>

Originally named Ferry Naminoue, MV Sewol was imported from Japan and illegally modified by Chonghaejin Marine Company under a fictitious contract in order to help the company continue to monopolize its service route. Investigations since the disaster have uncovered many illegal and corrupt actions related to the import and operation of MV Sewol, including unwarranted permits from the Incheon Port Authority, an illegal loan of 10,000,000,000 KRW from the Korea Development Bank, and careless inspections by both the Korean Register of Shipping and the Incheon Coast Guard. Suspicions have also been raised over the National Intelligence Service's alleged intervention in the modification of MV Sewol, the questionable management of MV Sewol's operation, and the interrogation of crewmembers after the sinking.

Around 9:00 PM on April 15, 2014, MV Sewol—which was allowed to operate only through a series of illegal or highly negligent practices—departed from the fog-shrouded port of Incheon, carrying 33 crewmembers and 443 passengers, 325 of whom were students from Danwon High School on a school trip. The ferry was also loaded with 2,210 tons of cargo. In the months after the accident, an investigation was carried out while the Sewol ferry was still underwater. At that time, the prosecution in charge of the investigation announced that the ferry had capsized after making a sudden turn, and that this steering error had been caused by the overloaded and poorly secured cargo, which reduced the ship's resilience to sinking. This claim was later supported by the examination of the hull, which revealed that the solenoid valves were partially locked. However, some investigators who examined the hull argued that the ship was adequately resilient to sinking and that the solenoid valves may not have been the direct cause of the sudden turn. More recently, the Special Investigation Commission on Social Disasters announced that there was likely no causal relationship between the fixation of the solenoid valves and the sudden turn, and that some of the evidence, including CCTV footage and tracking data, may have been manipulated. Based on these developments, new efforts—including a criminal investigation and special prosecution—are still needed to identify the cause of the sudden turn and the sinking of the Sewol Ferry.

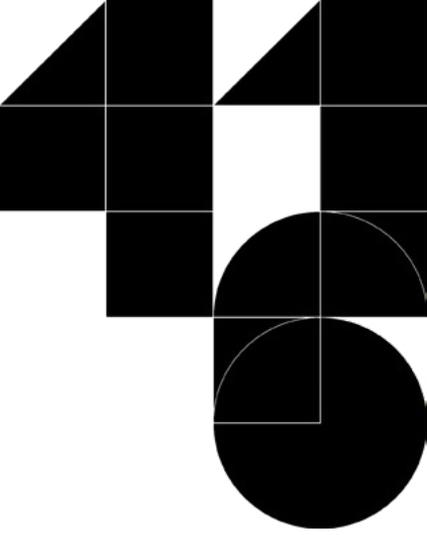
The reason that this incident is known as the Sewol Ferry Disaster, rather than a mere accident, is that many passengers who should have survived lost their lives. In this context, it is essential to note that various watertight doors and manholes that should have been sealed during operation were left open. Had all of these apertures been properly sealed, then the ferry would not have sunk in only 100 minutes. Thus, further investigation is needed to uncover who was responsible for sealing these doors and manholes and why they were not sealed.

At 8:49 AM on April 16, near Byeongpung Island, the Sewol ferry took a sharp right turn. Within one minute of this turn, the ferry was tilted at 47 degrees to the port side. At 8:52 AM, the first distress call to 119 (Korea's national emergency number) was placed by a Danwon High School student on board the ferry, and the Mokpo Coast Guard was notified of the situation within two minutes of that call. As ordered by the Mokpo Coast Guard, coastal patrol aircraft CN-235 arrived at the scene at 9:26 AM, followed by coastal patrol helicopters B-511 and B-513 at 9:27 and 9:32 (respectively), coastal patrol boat P123 at 9:35, and coastal patrol helicopter B-512 at 9:45.

None of these rescue forces made any attempt to communicate directly with MV Sewol to ascertain the situation inside the ship, or to enter the ship to usher the passengers out. Up until the moment of their own rescue at 9:45 AM, crewmembers repeatedly made announcements through the intercom telling the passengers below deck to "wear life vests and remain on board." Neglecting the passengers who were waiting to be rescued at the stern of the ship, Coast Guard Vessel 123 quickly made its way to the third-floor guardrail in the middle of the ship and the fifth-floor steering house in the bow, rescuing only crewmembers from the steering house and engine room.

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<sup>2</sup> Facts confirmed by the Sewol Families for Truth and a Safer Society.

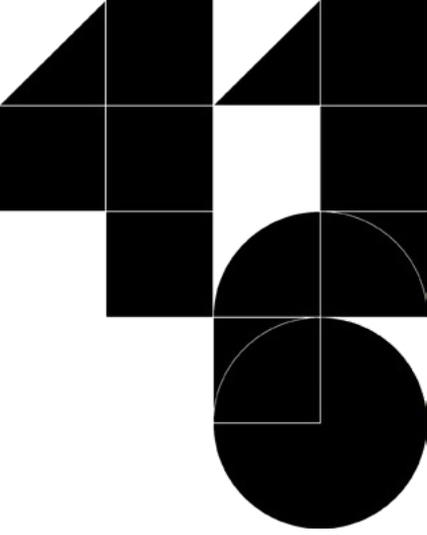


## Confirmed Facts About the Sewol Ferry Disaster

The Coast Guard and the Blue House both utterly failed to implement the proper measures for rescuing passengers aboard a sinking ship. First, no concrete or detailed rescue plans were ordered by the Blue House or any other command forces during the most crucial window of time, before the ferry had fully capsized. Furthermore, after eventually arriving on the scene, the Coast Guard made little or no effort to rescue the passengers from the capsizing ferry, particularly the hundreds who followed the order to remain below deck. For example, coastal patrol aircraft CN-235, which was capable of low-altitude flight, simply filmed the scene and restricted local air traffic. None of the responders instructed the passengers to abandon the ship, including Coast Guard Vessel 123, which was the first to arrive and was equipped with a loudspeaker. If the passengers had immediately been told to abandon the ship, it is estimated that everyone on board could have escaped within 10 minutes. Moreover, there were enough fishing boats and cargo boats in the area to hold all of the passengers after the rescue.

As soon as MV Sewol tilted 45 degrees to its port side, the flooding that commenced at deck C rapidly reached the interior of the ship through the open watertight doors and manholes, which should have been sealed. If those compartments had been properly secured, thus preventing the severe influx of water, it is estimated that the ferry could have remained at least partially afloat for more than 6 hours, with a 65 degree tilt to port side. In other words, the 100-minute window for rescue could have been extended to 300 minutes or more.

The crewmembers and staff who had failed to secure the doors and manholes and who had repeatedly instructed the passengers to remain below deck were the first to be rescued by the Coast Guard. By 10:30 AM, MV Sewol had almost entirely capsized, with only a part of its bow above water. As a result, there were 304 casualties, 250 of whom were students from Danwon High School.



## Significance of the Sewol Ferry Disaster

### **1. State's responsibility for the 304 casualties**

Between 8:49 AM, when MV Sewol began tilting, and 10:30 AM, when virtually the entire ship was underwater, no one from the government or Coast Guard made any effort to rescue the passengers onboard the sinking ferry. Through the entire span of the “golden time” when rescue was still possible, neither the rescue forces nor the Blue House, which should function as the control tower during national disasters, gave any orders to evacuate the ship, which should be the most immediate reaction whenever a boat is sinking. On April 16, as MV Sewol was steadily sinking, the state that is responsible for protecting the lives of its citizens was nowhere to be found.

### **2. Need for thorough investigation and punishment of culpable parties**

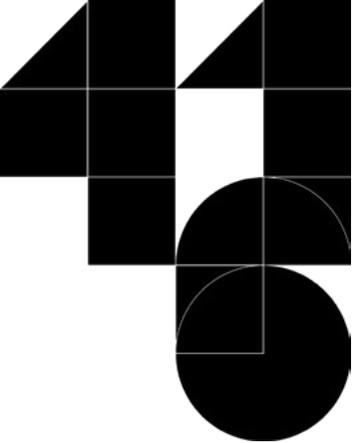
Following the disaster, at the behest of the victims' families and the public, the Special Investigation Commission on the Sewol Ferry Disaster was formed and began its investigation. During this investigation, however, the Park Geun-hye administration did everything in its power to hide the truth, including concealing evidence, offering false evidence, fabricating reports, obstructing the investigation, manipulating the media, and conducting surveillance of the bereaved. Thus, the search for the truth behind the Sewol Ferry Disaster remains ongoing. In order to ensure that no comparable disaster can ever happen again, the investigation must be completed without further obstacles and the culpable parties must be brought to justice.

### **3. Respect for life and building of a safe society**

From the time that the MV Sewol was imported through its entire period of operation, various parties blatantly colluded to prioritize individual and corporate profit over passenger safety, and the Sewol Disaster is the direct result of their corruption and negligence. The shipping company and industry, working hand-in-hand with the government, permitted an extremely dangerous ferry to continue operating at the expense of the precious lives of its passengers. Thanks to the perfunctory and one-sided investigation by prosecutors, with the assistance of judicial and legal authorities, the culpable parties have not yet been punished and the 304 innocent victims have not yet received justice.

### **4. Consolation of victims and social reconciliation**

Notably, the 304 casualties, their families, and the survivors are not the only victims of the Sewol Ferry Disaster; the entire nation of Korea watched in real-time as their brethren drowned in the sea. However, those responsible for these lives have constantly obscured and distorted the truth to evade accountability. Even worse, they have resorted to circulating fake news that insults or vilifies the deceased and the bereaved, driving a deep wedge into the populace. While the survivors most directly affected by the disaster remain in serious distress, the members of the Korean public also continue to suffer from wounds that will not heal.



## Stories of citizens and the families

### #Prologue 1

Among all of the parents and families who have been working so diligently to realize the 4.16 Life Safety Park, the special committee “Sewol Families for Truth and A Safer Society” deserves special mention for their tireless dedication and effort. This prologue shares their stories.

**“There is no reason to fear our children.”**

In Korean society, memorial facilities are often subject to various criticisms and stereotypes. Although the 4.16 Life Safety Park is consciously being planned and designed to avoid conventions that might be viewed unfavorably, the project has still been subject to adamant opposition and malicious censure from certain parties. Even in the face of such hostility, the victims’ families remain steadfast in their determination to keep their promise to their fellow citizens, upholding their firm belief in the importance of collective reflection for future generations.

Since 2014, the Sewol families have witnessed the ineptitude and neglect of the state at multiple levels, from the failed rescue effort to the obstruction of the investigation through concealment and fabrication. Sparing no insult, some parties have even castigated the families’ struggle as an “ideological” project (i.e., a thinly veiled accusation of Socialism). But even so, the families persevere in their ongoing battle to ensure that the wrongful sacrifices of their children do not fade from memory. At present, the remains of the victims are scattered across more than eight different sites. The 4.16 Life Safety Park is especially meaningful in creating a single site where the victims can be reunited and commemorated together.

**“First and foremost, we want this to be a space that embraces our poor departed children…We want to provide a warm and comfortable haven for them.”**

After initially grieving separately for their own children, the families of the Danwon High School students and of all the Sewol victims began coming together, eventually turning their eyes to the nation and people of Korea as a whole. The families sincerely hope that the 304 lives lost on April 16, including 250 school-children, were not in vain.

Members of the “Sewol Families for Truth and A Safer Society” Committee (from right): Buja Jung, mother of Hosung Shin; Soongil Kim, mother of Yoonhee Jin; Junghwa Park, mother of Eunjung Cho; Byunghwan Oh, father of Youngseok Oh



**“We do not want this park to be built from pity, but rather to help our generation learn and reflect, and ultimately to create a safer society.”**

**“I hope that it becomes a place of compassionate learning and reflection, where our children will inspire us to look back at our lives and to remember the importance of co-existence.”**

**“As a parent, it would mean the world to me to hear others say that our children guided Ansan through times of agony towards a vital change in our society.”**

There has been some concern about how to combine a cultural and leisure space with a space for commemoration. In this context, some have speculated that the model is simply an attempt to placate those who are opposed to enshrinement facilities. With regards to this issue, the sincere and moving responses of the parents took us by surprise:

**“I hope that the park is very lively, teeming with visitors who can tell our children, ‘You’re not alone any more’ and ‘We’re doing the things that you didn’t get to enjoy. But you see us now, right?’”**

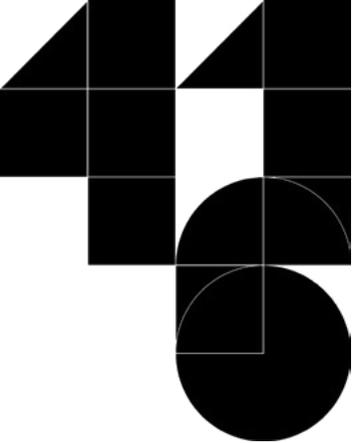
**“We envision citizens visiting at their leisure, children painting, teenagers dancing, boasting their talents, and holding discussions. We hope that adults come here to unwind, gazing at the trees and flowers.”**

The parents truly hope that many people will come to visit and remember their children at the park, so that the victims no longer have to feel alone. To honor the parents’ wish for the park to become a social center and a symbol of respect for life and safety, the Life Safety Park must take a distinctive and innovative approach to commemoration through a future-oriented design.

**“This is a space for future generations, rather than a conventional commemoration facility as we know it. We hope for a wide range of creative ideas to break conventions.”**

The parents left us with a final invitation for the designers:

**“Please join us in creating a new history.”**



## Stories of citizens and the families

### #Prologue 2

This “Citizen’s Guide for the International Design Competition of the 4.16 Life Safety Park” could not have been realized without the active input of members of the general public. This section contains the stories of facilitators who played a crucial role in collecting the opinions of victims’ families and the general public.

As members of the local community, the facilitators sincerely hope that the 4.16 Life Safety Park will be naturally woven into their neighborhood, enhancing the daily lives of residents and visitors alike. Hwarang Public Garden (i.e., the prospective site of the park) has long been a welcoming space for entertainment and relaxation among locals, and it is of the utmost importance that the park continue to serve this purpose as an organic part of the community, without becoming a melancholy or uninviting space.

**“I think that the 4.16 Life Safety Park will diversify and expand our day-to-day lives. That said, I hope that the park does not assume an overly solemn aura. That is essential.”**

**“It’s a nice park for anyone to visit. But couldn’t it be more than just a nice park?”**

Some have stressed that the park should be more than just another aesthetically pleasing space. Facilitators and citizens alike have emphasized that both the meaning behind the park and the object of remembrance should be unequivocal in the design.

**“In the open discussions with the public, many have expressed their hopes that the meaning of the park be emphasized. Thus, I think the most important task at hand is to achieve a balance between the meaning and the friendly hospitality of the space. Hopefully, the design guidelines for the park will capture the need for this balance, so that the designers will strive to create a familiar and friendly place that is still infused with an important meaning.”**

However, facilitators were also a bit concerned about the sheer quantity and diversity of different hopes and demands that emerged through the process of collecting opinions from citizens and the families of victims.



**“How can we fit all of this into such a small space?”**

With this in mind, the facilitators agreed that restricting the Life Safety Park to the existing boundaries of the site would be too limiting. Asserting that the construction could be subsumed within the overall project to renovate Hwarang Public Garden, they advocated expanding the scope of the park into various parts of the garden, as well as into the streets leading to Gojan-dong and around Danwon High School itself.

**“The park needs to connect with the various components of Hwarang Public Garden. Rather than confining our attention to a single site, we should be looking at the garden as a whole. Furthermore, the park should connect naturally with the surrounding neighborhoods.”**

The facilitators concur that several important points must be remembered in the design process. First, citing successful precedents, the facilitators requested that all prospective designers be receptive to public communication and participation. In addition, they emphasized that the designers should recognize and empathize with the Sewol disaster, its victims, and the events that have transpired after the disaster.

**“We hope that the design represents the stories and crucial points of the entire Sewol episode, just like a historical account. By learning the entire story, the families can also be comforted. Only by fully comprehending the Sewol disaster and empathizing with the families’ grief can the designers hope to capture the struggle for truth. And only then will the park be able to speak to visitors and offer solace to the families.”**

The Sewol families joined the facilitators in asking for designers’ contribution in creating a new history. The families truly hope that, once the park is complete, all of the residents of Ansan will immediately appreciate its novel approach and meaning in guiding the community toward reconciliation and healing.

**“It will turn out beautifully! Even those who opposed the construction will enjoy all that the space has to offer. It will prove to be a meaningful space for everyone, just as it should be.”**