

February 4, 2026

MIR-26-04

Fire aboard Fishing Vessel *Spicy Lady*

On March 6, 2025, about 1320 local time, the commercial fishing vessel *Spicy Lady* was fishing in Chatham Strait about 1 mile west of Point Gardner, Alaska, when the vessel caught fire (see figure 1 and figure 2).¹ The five crewmembers on board were unable to extinguish the fire and abandoned the vessel onto a nearby Good Samaritan vessel. The fire was later extinguished by responding firefighters. One crewmember suffered minor injuries. No pollution was reported. The vessel was declared a total constructive loss, valued at \$1.6 million.



Figure 1. *Spicy Lady* being towed after the fire. (Source: *Spicy Lady* captain)

¹ (a) In this report, all times are Alaska standard time, and all miles are nautical miles (1.15 statute miles). (b) Visit [ntsb.gov](https://www.ntsb.gov) to find additional information in the [public docket](#) for this NTSB investigation (case no. DCA25FM022).

Casualty Summary

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Casualty type | Fire/Explosion |
| Location | Chatham Strait, about 1 mile west of Point Gardener, Alaska 57°02.09' N, 134°39.33' W |
| Date | March 6, 2025 |
| Time | 1320 Alaska standard time (coordinated universal time -9 hrs) |
| Persons on board | 5 |
| Injuries | 1 minor |
| Property damage | \$1.6 million |
| Environmental damage | None |
| Weather | Visibility 9 mi, overcast, winds east-southeast 12 kts, air temperature 44°F |
| Waterway information | Strait; width 4.5 nm, depth 1,571 ft |



Figure 2. Area where the *Spicy Lady* fire occurred, as indicated by a circled X. (Background source: Google Maps)

1 Factual Information

On March 2, 2025, the 58-foot-long steel-hulled fishing vessel *Spicy Lady* got underway from Heritage Harbor near Wrangell, Alaska, with a crew of five. Between March 2 and March 5, the *Spicy Lady* transited near Frederick Sound and Chatham Strait while fishing for golden king crab.

On March 6, at 1320, the crew of the *Spicy Lady* was fishing in Chatham Strait about 1 mile west of Point Gardner, Alaska. Crewmembers on the aft working deck were preparing to haul in a crab pot when they noticed smoke coming from the main cabin, which was forward on the same deck. The deck boss and another crewmember entered the main cabin to investigate the source of the smoke and observed a fire in a crew berthing area located near the bow of the vessel.² (The crew berthing area was a “V-berth” with six bunks—three on the port side and three on the starboard side.) Upon entering the berthing area, the deck boss observed that a mattress was on fire in the portside middle bunk and attempted to remove it but was unsuccessful. According to the deck boss, the mattress broke apart in his hands, and “only a chunk came off.”

The crewmembers attempted to fight the fire using handheld fire extinguishers and hoses from the vessel’s washdown pump but were forced to evacuate the main cabin due to increasing smoke and limited visibility. One deckhand noted that the fire grew “exponentially” when the main cabin door was opened. After evacuating the cabin, the crew closed all doors, windows, and vents to the main cabin, and retrieved the liferaft on the aft working deck. The crew were unable to shut down the main engine and generator due to the fire.

While on the aft working deck, the captain used a cell phone to call the nearby fishing vessel *Angelette* for assistance and then notified the US Coast Guard. The *Angelette* responded to the *Spicy Lady*. At 1400, the *Spicy Lady* crew boarded the *Angelette*, and the *Angelette* crew initiated a tow of the *Spicy Lady* (see figure 3). Another nearby fishing vessel, *Westerly*, assisted in escorting the vessels toward Warm Springs Bay near Baranof Island, Alaska.

² Deck boss is a title commonly used on fishing vessels to refer to the senior non-licensed deck supervisor.



Figure 3. The *Spicy Lady* under tow by the *Angelette* after the crew evacuated to the *Angelette*. (Source: Wrangell Volunteer Fire Department)

At 1432, the captain of the *Spicy Lady* notified the Wrangell Volunteer Fire Department, located in Wrangell, Alaska (about 100 miles from the *Spicy Lady*'s location), of the fire. The fire department prepared their gear and boarded a floatplane, which departed Wrangell at 1509 with three firefighters on board. At 1603, the floatplane landed in Warm Springs Bay, where it met the *Westerly*. The firefighters boarded the *Westerly* with their gear, and the crew aboard the *Westerly* transported them to the *Spicy Lady* just outside of Warm Springs Bay.

Once aboard the *Spicy Lady*, firefighters set up a portable fire pump and entered the main cabin. They encountered heat and heavy smoke and traced the origin of the fire to the forward berthing area. Using water and foam, the firefighters extinguished the fire. After the fire was extinguished, the crew ventilated the cabin

and shut down the main engine and generator, and the *Spicy Lady* was towed to a dock in Warm Springs Bay. Upon arrival in Warm Springs Bay, the *Spicy Lady* was met by the US Coast Guard fast response cutter *Douglas Denman*, which had arrived about 1740 to assist with the response.

The *Spicy Lady* deck boss, who had attempted to remove the burning mattress from the bunk, sustained burns to his hands and was transported to a medical center in Wrangell for treatment. He told firefighters that when he entered the forward berthing area to investigate the source of the smoke, he observed a burning “plastic tote” on the mattress in the portside middle bunk, which contained an “unknown amount” of lithium-ion batteries. The *Spicy Lady* captain told investigators the batteries were associated with “a personal item being charged in that port bunk.” The captain noted that another two or three lithium-ion batteries used for handheld power tools were stored in the starboard-side bottom bunk, but he stated that these batteries were not being charged at the time of the fire. The captain also noted that after the fire, numerous circuit breakers were tripped on the vessel’s power distribution panel.

The Wrangell Volunteer Fire Department determined that the fire originated in a portside bunk in the forward berthing area. Their report noted that the crew’s actions to close all windows, doors, and vents helped to slow the spread of the fire. The exact source of the fire was not determined in their report.

In the weeks following the fire, a damage survey of the *Spicy Lady* was completed on behalf of the vessel’s insurer. The survey report found that the forward berthing area was “completely destroyed by direct fire, high heat, and heavy soot and smoke,” and that the heaviest fire damage was on the port side of the space, aft (see figure 4). According to the survey report, the forward berthing area had two alternating current (AC) power outlets (one port and one starboard), one AC light switch mounted on the port side, and a 12-volt direct current (DC) reading light in each bunk. The surveyor found that the AC wire for the portside power outlet and light switch was bare and showed signs of corrosion and electrical arcing. The survey report showed the portside outlet had a power strip plugged into it.

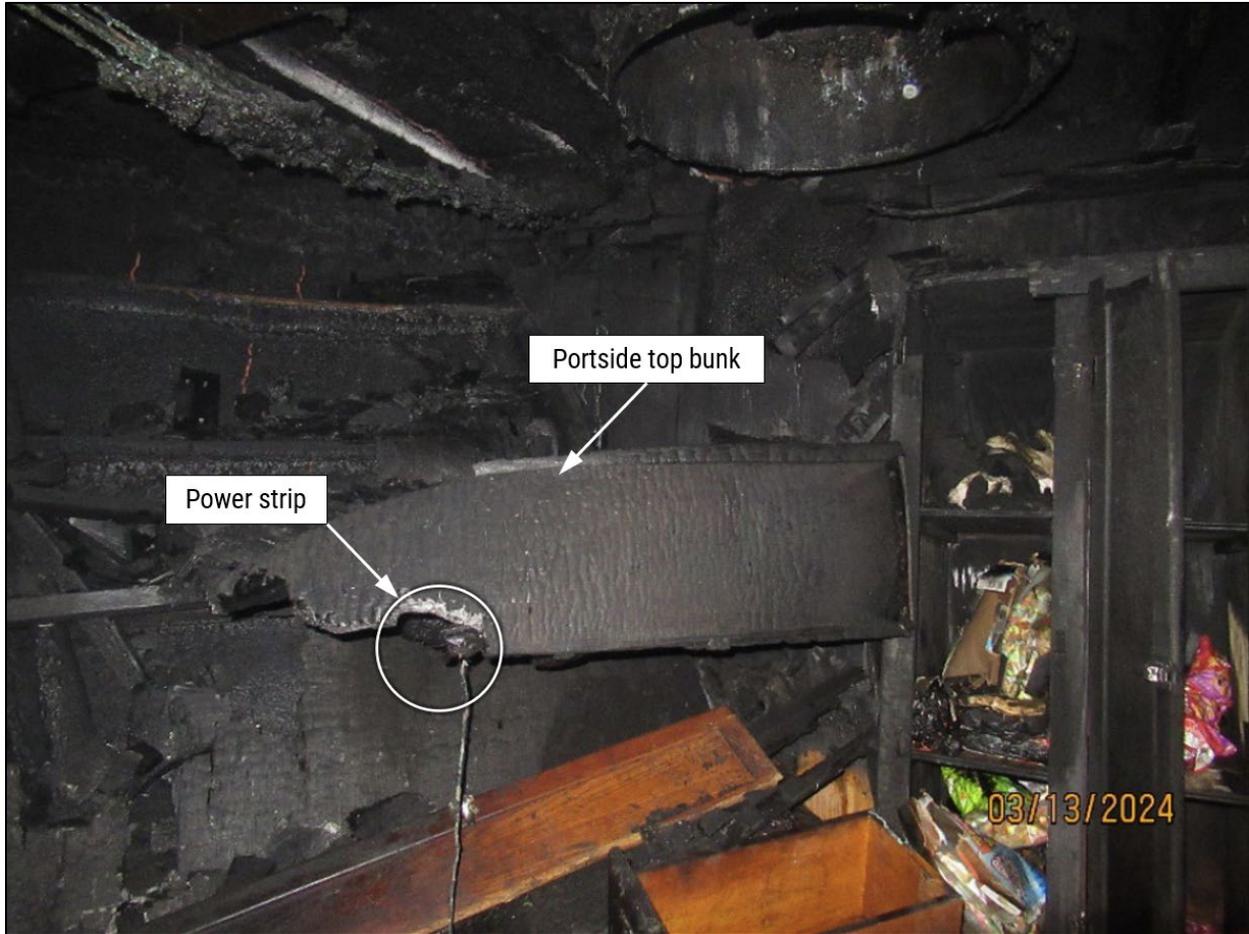


Figure 4. Fire damage to the portside bunks in the forward berthing area. (Background source: Blomquist Marine Surveyors)

Other areas of the main cabin, including the galley, crew dining area, and captain's cabin, sustained substantial smoke and heat damage. In the wheelhouse, numerous electronics, windows, and furnishings were damaged and required replacement. The engine room sustained lesser damage but was "impacted heavily by heavy oil, seawater, smoke and soot residuals."

The survey determined that the vessel was a constructive total loss valued at \$1.6 million. A causal investigation was not completed as part of the damage survey, and as such, the exact source of the fire was not determined.

2 Analysis

While the crew of the *Spicy Lady* was fishing in Chatham Strait, about 1 mile west of Point Gardner, Alaska, they saw smoke and discovered a fire in a berthing area inside the main cabin. The fire was later extinguished by responding firefighters.

When the crew entered the cabin to investigate the smoke, they discovered a fire near the portside middle bunk in the forward crew berthing area. They found that the bunk mattress was burning, as was a “plastic tote” containing lithium-ion batteries for personal items, which may have been charging at the time. Post-fire photos showed that, compared to other areas of the vessel, the portside bunks in the forward berthing area were the most severely damaged and thus experienced the highest level of heat. Additionally, the responding firefighters and the marine surveyor’s report both concluded that the most severe smoke and fire damage was located in this area, and that this was the area of origin.

Possible ignition sources in the forward berthing area included electrical wiring, electrical components, and the lithium-ion batteries stored in the portside bunk (some of which the captain said were charging at the time). Although electrical arcing and corrosion were found to be present on the electrical wires in the berthing area post-fire, investigators were unable to determine when this occurred in the ignition sequence, and it is possible that the arcing and corrosion occurred after the initial fire or during firefighting efforts. Likewise, due to severe fire damage in the berthing area, and because the space was unoccupied when the fire started, investigators were unable to determine when the bag containing the lithium-ion batteries caught fire or what caused it to ignite. Therefore, an exact ignition source and sequence could not be determined.

3 Conclusions

3.1 Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the fire on board the fishing vessel *Spicy Lady* was an unknown source on a bunk in the forward berthing area.

Vessel Particulars

| Vessel | <i>Spicy Lady</i> |
|----------------------------|---|
| NTSB Vessel Type | Fishing (Fishing vessel) |
| Owner/Operator | Private Citizen (Commercial) |
| Flag | United States |
| Port of registry | Petersburg, Alaska |
| Year built | 1992 |
| Official number | 982857 (US) |
| IMO number | N/A |
| Classification society | N/A |
| Length (overall) | 57.9 ft (17.6 m) |
| Breadth (max.) | 22.0 ft (6.7 m) |
| Draft (casualty) | 11.0 ft (3.4 m) |
| Tonnage | 87 GRT |
| Engine power; manufacturer | 400 hp (298 kW); Cummins KTA 19-A diesel engine |

NTSB investigators worked closely with our counterparts from **Coast Guard Sector Juneau** throughout this investigation.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant events in other modes of transportation—railroad, transit, highway, marine, pipeline, and commercial space. We determine the probable cause of the accidents and events we investigate, and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. In addition, we conduct transportation safety research studies and offer information and other assistance to family members and survivors for any accident or event investigated by the agency. We also serve as the appellate authority for enforcement actions involving aviation and mariner certificates issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and US Coast Guard, and we adjudicate appeals of civil penalty actions taken by the FAA.

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For more detailed background information on this report, visit the [NTSB Case Analysis and Reporting Online \(CAROL\) website](#) and search for NTSB accident ID DCA25FM022. Recent publications are available in their entirety on the [NTSB website](#). Other information about available publications also may be obtained from the website or by contacting—

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