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MIR-26-23

Fire aboard Fishing Vessel *Sub Zero*

On August 8, 2024, about 2130 local time, the commercial fishing vessel *Sub Zero* was transiting in Nushagak Bay, about 28 miles south of Dillingham, Alaska, when the crew discovered a fire in the engine compartment (see figure 1 and figure 2).¹ The two crewmembers aboard attempted to fight the fire but were unsuccessful. They abandoned the vessel into a liferaft and were rescued by a good Samaritan vessel. The *Sub Zero* burned to the waterline and sank. There were no injuries, and no pollution was reported. The vessel was a total loss estimated at \$650,000.



Figure 1. *Sub Zero* during survey in March 2024. (Source: Rocky Point Surveys, LLC)

¹ (a) In this report, all times are Alaska daylight time, and all miles are nautical miles (1.15 statute miles) unless otherwise noted. (b) Visit [ntsb.gov](https://www.ntsb.gov) to find additional information in the [public docket](#) for this NTSB investigation (case no. DCA24FM055).

Casualty Summary

NTSB casualty category	Fire/Explosion
Location	Nushagak Bay, 28 nm south of Dillingham, Alaska 58°33.32' N, 158°29.52' W
Date	August 8, 2024
Time	2130 Alaska daylight time (coordinated universal time -8 hrs)
Persons on board	2
Injuries	0
Property damage	\$650,000 est.
Environmental damage	None
Weather	Visibility 10 mi, cloudy, winds southwest 11 kts, seas 4-6 ft, air temperature 52°F, water temperature 59°F, sunset 2343
Waterway information	Bay; depth about 80 ft



Figure 2. Area where the fire aboard the fishing vessel *Sub Zero* occurred, as indicated by a circled X. (Background source: Google Maps)

1 Factual Information

The 32-foot-long commercial fishing vessel *Sub Zero* was constructed of molded fiberglass (fiberglass-reinforced plastic) by Freestyle Marine LLC in Homer, Alaska, in 2020. Propulsion was provided by one 815-hp diesel engine driving a single four-blade propeller. A rudder behind the propeller provided steering. The *Sub Zero* had a vessel monitoring system with four cameras: two on the aft deck and two in the engine compartment. The camera footage could be viewed live in the wheelhouse.

On August 8, 2024, the *Sub Zero* was transiting from Togiak, Alaska, to Dillingham, Alaska, to replenish supplies in preparation for fishing in the Nushagak commercial salmon fishery.² The captain and a crewmember were aboard.

About 0930, the vessel was off Protection Point, Alaska, about 28 miles south of Dillingham, when the captain noticed white smoke on the wheelhouse display for the engine compartment cameras. He directed the other crewmember aboard to open the lazarette hatch to access the aft end of the engine compartment to investigate. According to the crewmember, when he opened the hatch, “a sudden burst of fire” erupted from the space.

The crewmember used a washdown hose to fight the fire and discharged two 5-pound handheld dry chemical fire extinguishers into the space. The captain attempted to access the engine compartment via a door within the accommodation space—the only other access point to the compartment. However, he was unable to do so due to smoke and flames.

Minutes later, the vessel lost power. The captain went back to the wheelhouse and, about 0934, he made a mayday call via VHF radio. He then retrieved two immersion (survival) suits and directed the crewmember to don one. The captain then deployed the vessel’s liferaft from the top of the wheelhouse. The captain also retrieved the emergency position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) and gave it to the crewmember before donning his own immersion suit. The captain told investigators that, because the vessel was completely engulfed in fire, he and the other crewmember were forced to evacuate the vessel into the liferaft.

Once the liferaft was a safe distance from the burning vessel, the crew activated the EPIRB. The captain estimated they were in the liferaft for 15–20 minutes

² The commercial salmon fishery in the Nushagak District opened on June 26. See [2024 Bristol Bay annual management report](#).

before being recovered by the nearby good Samaritan fishing vessel *Bay Watch*. The *Sub Zero* continued to burn until sinking. The vessel was not salvaged.

The captain told investigators that he suspected the fire could have been from the hydraulic system because he initially saw smoke near the hydraulic fuel tank. The captain stated that the engine compartment was very clean and that he did not store combustible materials in the space.

The *Sub Zero* was last surveyed in March 2024 while the vessel was in dry storage in Homer. The surveyor's report stated, "Vessel appears sound and well built, overall condition: Excellent."

2 Analysis

While the fishing vessel *Sub Zero* was transiting Nushagak Bay, a fire started in the engine compartment. The two crewmembers on board attempted to fight the fire but were unsuccessful and were forced to abandon the vessel into a liferaft. They were rescued by a good Samaritan fishing vessel before the *Sub Zero* sank.

The captain initially observed smoke in the aft end of the engine compartment on the display for the two engine compartment cameras. He told investigators that the smoke appeared to be near the vessel's hydraulic fuel tank but could not definitively confirm its location. The vessel burned to the waterline, sank, and was not salvaged, so investigators could not access and inspect the vessel to determine the origin and cause of the fire. Therefore, the ignition source could not be determined.

3 Conclusions

3.1 Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the fire aboard the fishing vessel *Sub Zero* was an unknown source within its engine compartment.

Vessel Particulars

Vessel	<i>Sub Zero</i>
NTSB vessel group	Fishing (Fishing vessel)
Owner/operator	Private Owner (Commercial)
Flag	United States
Port of registry	Homer, Alaska
Year built	2020
Official number	1303041 (US)
IMO number	N/A
Classification society	N/A
Length (overall)	32.0 ft (9.8 m)
Breadth (max.)	15.0 ft (4.6 m)
Draft (casualty)	Unknown
Tonnage	22 GRT
Engine power; manufacturer	1 × 815 hp (599 kW); FPT F3JFA616C*Q diesel engine

NTSB investigators worked closely with our counterparts from **Coast Guard Sector Western Alaska and US Arctic** throughout this investigation.

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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 DCA24FM055. 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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