

COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL SAFETY PRESENTATION

Thanks to the required installation of appropriate life saving equipment and the placement of safety guards around deck winches, personal injuries have decreased over the past twenty years.

However, injuries and deaths aboard fishing vessels are still at an unnecessary level; from fire, flooding, and collision. The root cause of most of these incidents is the lack of training and/or proper vessel maintenance.

Based on my experience, two of the major causes of fires, have been: fuel leaks spraying on hot engine surfaces, on vessels without fixed fire fighting systems in the engine rooms, and LPG leaks from poorly installed systems that did not meet NFPA or ABYC Standards.

Common causes of flooding in southern waters have been from flooding of the lazarette with sea water, which then flowed through a drain pipe to the engine room where no high water alarm was installed.

Proper regularly scheduled maintenance of rudder and shaft packing glands, removal of drain pipes to engine rooms, and proper installation of high water alarms would greatly decrease flooding incidents, which cause drownings, injuries and loss of vessels.

Collisions are usually found to have been caused by the vessel having no one on duty in the pilot house, while the entire crew is on the back deck working, with the vessel proceeding on automatic pilot.

The next most frequent cause is having the least experienced, youngest, crew member on duty, while the rest of the crew rests, with the vessel proceeding on a long drag, programmed into the auto pilot.

Often times the "On Watch" person is not familiar with the Rules of The Road as far as navigation lights are concerned, does not know how to operate, or interpret, the radar information, does not understand the local VHF radio language, does not know how to determine the vessel's location, and tends to be preoccupied with personal activities or falls asleep.

The past twenty years experiences with the voluntary USCG Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examination process, has definitely seen an improvement in some sectors of the commercial fishing industry, with fewer injuries, deaths and monetary losses.

However, in other areas of the industry, compliance has been poor with many vessels opting out, often due to lack of resources to acquire the necessary equipment.

Optimum safety and reduction of deaths and injuries on commercial fishing vessels can only be accomplished with mandatory examinations, as the past 20 years has shown.

This would entail additional equipment being required over and above what is now included in the voluntary examination, most of which could be copied from the latest towing vessel requirements.

Obviously, the Coast Guard does not have sufficient personnel, even with Coast Guard Auxiliary assistance, nor the resources, to accomplish this, so third party professional Certified or Accredited marine surveyors would be an important asset. All examiners would need frequent training, at least annually, to remain current with all the requirements.

Sufficient fees would need to be acquired from the vessels, by the Coast Guard, in order to provide the examiners the incentive to conduct these examinations.

This would be necessary to avoid the appearance of any conflict of interest between the vessel operator and the examiner, such as the vessel paying the examiner directly for a lenient exam, which would be a definite NAMS and SAMS Ethics violation, and to insure compliance with all facets of the examination.

Also, required training of all commercial fishing vessel crews in matters such as navigation rules, communications, radar operation, fire fighting and situational awareness, needs to be addressed by private schools, or area

fishing vessel associations, with Coast Guard approved diplomas awarded for successful completion in all subjects.

Only with the above measures enacted, can a real safety program be successful.