

ANATOMY OF A COMMUNITY BASED MARINE SAFETY INSTRUCTOR NETWORK

Jerry Dzugan, Executive Director
Alaska Marine Safety Education Association (AMSEA)
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In 1983, in response to the high number of commercial fishing and other boating fatalities in Alaska in the late 1970s and early 1980's a grassroots effort by individuals who worked for different groups started meeting with a mission to *"Reduce injury and death in the marine and freshwater environment through education and training provided by a network of qualified marine safety instructors."*

To accomplish this goal several objectives needed to be met:

1. Develop updated, current and hands on marine safety curriculum relevant to commercial fishermen and other boaters.
2. Provide instructor training (train the trainer) in marine safety so that fishing ports would have their own locally based instructor resources. This train the trainer course became known as the Marine Safety Instructor-Training (MSIT) workshop, which is the only train the trainer workshop that is Coast Guard accepted and is specific to commercial fishing safety.
3. Provide instructors who have local knowledge of fisheries and associated risks with training equipment such as liferafts and immersions suits, instructional materials such as DVDs, books and other training aides. Support of instructors was also needed in co-teaching and mentoring new instructors until they could become more established.
4. Coordination between agencies and people so that the scant resources available for this training could be shared and maximized.
5. Training in the schools was seen as important because it was realized that it was easier to change the safety culture while people were still young . Since commercial fishing is the largest employer in the state, many of these children would become commercial fishermen and boaters, especially those who live in coastal communities.
6. For communities without local training resources or instructors, establish a training delivery program that could be taken "on the road" to delivery training to where fishermen live and work. This was especially important to remove barriers to training due to the remoteness of many fishing ports and thus lower cost to the fishing industry.

The people who founded AMSEA were from agencies that were affected most by marine safety. They represented the following groups:

1. U.S. Coast Guard search and rescue airstations in Alaska.
2. Alaska Emergency Medical Services (EMS).
3. Alaska Sea Grant.
4. Alaska State Troopers.
5. Tribal Health Corporations.

Soon thereafter, other groups and individuals were added that represented:

6. Marine safety advocates.
7. Commercial fishermen.
8. Research agencies such as the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).
9. The state occupational training facility Alaska Vocational Technical Center
10. Coast Guard fishing vessel and noncommercial boating safety offices.

This group was a unique combination of local, state and federal organizations as well as individuals who had a common goal and different resources that they could provide to fulfill these objectives. Most had experience in the fishing industry. It was a grassroots effort by people such as Coast Guard helicopter pilots who had to fly out on stormy nights to rescue people, EMS personnel who had to deal with victims and victims families. But most of all, since the problems were so widespread and the fishing communities are so small, most of these early AMSEA founders knew the victims and their families, so it was a very real and personal issue. It was these individuals that saw the need to increase coordination and efforts in marine safety training and convinced their bosses that cooperation was needed.

By the mid 1980s this group had formed a non profit 501c3 organization named the Alaska Marine Safety Education Association (AMSEA) and work began within a more formal organization. The need for this effort was evident in the fact that almost immediately there was interest from around the state and in other parts of the U.S.

AMSEA has retained its original structure while it has grown. The Board has expanded to include people outside Alaska in recognition of the fact that 30% to 40% of AMSEA's efforts are now outside the state and this percentage is growing. AMSEA staff who work for the Board are located in AMSEA's main office in Sitka, Alaska which is the third largest fishing port in Alaska in terms of fish value and the ninth largest in the nation. AMSEA has or has had, "satellite" offices in various other Alaska cities such as Anchorage, Kodiak, Juneau as well as in Idaho.

AMSEA staff work full time, part time, seasonal or on an on-needs basis. Staff currently consist of a Director/Education Specialist, Training Coordinators (4), Gear Manager, Financial Manager, IT systems/Course Promotion, Marketing/Publications personnel. Nearly all staff are also trainers and have a commercial fishing background. The fact that staff also are trainers and know the fishing industry personally, is a very important factor in keeping AMSEA's work relevant.

AMSEA instructors who complete the MSIT training and who teach fishermen can teach AMSEA's Coast Guard accepted Drill Conductor courses and other safety workshops for fishermen. The instructors may work for AMSEA directly as staff, as contractors for specific courses, as employees of other agencies or as volunteers. These instructors come from a wide variety of backgrounds but must have experience as fishermen or in the fishing industry. Some instructors have their own private training companies, are working commercial fishermen, or come from the

survival equipment industry. Still others work for agencies or are teachers or educators. Some instructors charge for their services, some are volunteers and some are paid by and work through their agencies or places of employment. Graduates of the MSIT class are thus “free agents”. Although they may teach AMSEA’s Coast Guard approved classes if they are qualified, they do not have to work for AMSEA directly. This gives maximum flexibility to supporting instructors and providing training in a wide range of circumstances.

The MSIT workshops have trained over 1,000 MSITs across the U.S. Over 100 of these MSITs have been active in directly training fishermen. Many others facilitate training by assisting in course promotion, equipment use and networking. They do everything from making the coffee before class to walking the local docks to promote class attendance. For example, a new AMSEA instructor working in Florida, can be introduced to an important facilitator or training equipment source that is an AMSEA contact located just a short distance away, that the new instructor would otherwise had not known was available as a resource locally.

The AMSEA instructor network has been a model for other parts of the nation. Besides community networks in a number of Alaska ports such as Kodiak, Cordova and Sitka, AMSEA has helped form networks in the Pacific Northwest, Oregon/Northern California, South Texas, Florida, Mid Atlantic, Massachusetts and Maine.

The ability of combining resources from a number of partners to deliver meaningful, relevant training to fishermen who would otherwise not have access to training, has been well demonstrated. This network has trained over 9,000 Coast Guard accepted Emergency Drill Conductors in over 1,000 courses in over 100 different fishing ports across the U.S. Also, 165,000 others have been trained in other safety workshops in the past 25 years. This instructor network has an over-capacity for training and its potential has not been maximized.

The cost savings to the fishing industry has been large. Training costs to fishermen have been minimal or at no cost, saving the industry over \$1,500,000 for Drill Conductor tuition alone. This also does not include the savings made from fishermen not having to spend money on travel to attend training. Through the sharing of local resources, grants, contracts, local fundraising, AMSEA memberships and contributions, the AMSEA model of community based training can be an important contribution to the needed effort to train commercial fishermen with quality hands on training, while at the same time removing or easing financial barriers that prevent fishermen from taking training.

The need for training is just as great as it was 25 years ago. As training requirements and new training is realized, there will be an increased need for training networks such as AMSEAs. Such outreach training is especially needed to access the smaller boat fishing fleet, which comprises the greatest number of vessels, as well as to augment and coordinate with more centralized training facilities.