

# Fishing Vessel Safety

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**I thank the NTSB for giving me the opportunity to participate in this fishing vessel safety forum.**

The Greater New Bedford Fishermen Safety Collaborative is a public interest group composed of community and civic organizations that includes the City of New Bedford, the New Bedford Harbor Development Commission, Shore Support, commercial fishermen, fishing industry suppliers and safety trainers, the U.S. Coast Guard, UMASS Dartmouth (SMAST), and New Directions Southcoast Inc., a non-profit workforce training and development organization. The collaborative was created in response to the significant need to provide commercial fishermen with essential safety training that will ensure their ability to respond to the many emergencies encountered in the most dangerous occupation in the U.S.

## **Background**

On Dec. 20, 2004, five of six crew members of the 75-foot fishing vessel Northern Edge died when the boat sank off Nantucket in 8- to 10-foot seas and 30-degree weather, with winds gusting to 45 knots. It was the deadliest fishing accident off New England in nearly 15 years. This tragedy spawned an outpouring of sentiment and demands that something needed to be done locally to reduce the loss of life and injuries resulting from at-sea emergencies in the commercial fishing industry. Meetings between the Mayor of New Bedford and NOAA administrators, with strong support from the MA congressional delegations, resulted in a \$100,000 NOAA grant matched with \$50,000 of local Workforce Development funds. These monies provided the resources to create a New Bedford area focused Fishermen Safety Training Program. New Directions Southcoast, Inc. (NDSI) took on the development and management of the training and together with the other stakeholders implemented a program that has been held 20 times and trained 1,059 fishermen since April 2005. There have been no accidents or near accidents at any of these trainings.

# Fishing Vessel Safety

## The Program

The SMAST facility accommodates all the training stations in one location allowing for maximum training time and effectiveness. To ensure “buy in” by the fishing community and to focus attention on the most important issues affecting safety at sea, the program was designed as hands on, uses a curriculum approved by the Coast Guard, is free to the fishermen and covers the following topics: **man overboard, fire fighting, emergency communications, life raft equipment and deployment, EPIRBS, signal flares, damage control (patching and flood control procedures including pump operation, basic stability), and donning on & proper use of the immersion suits.** In addition, a Coast Guard helicopter and crew provide instruction in proper at sea hoist procedures. Total class size is kept to a maximum of 75. The fishermen are divided into five groups and each group spends 50 minutes in each of five stations actually handling the equipment, putting out a fire, shooting off flares, patching a leaking pipe, and putting on their survival suits, jumping in the water and entering a life raft. Interpreters are on hand for non-English speaking fishermen and rescue swimmers are stationed in the tank area when the fishermen enter the water and participate in climbing into a life raft. Each of the instructors are Coast Guard certified Fishing Vessel Safety Instructors.

The success of this free program is validated by the enthusiastic response from the fishermen themselves and the several real life at sea emergencies over the past year where the skills learned allowed for successful handling of life threatening situations. The program has been embraced by the Massachusetts Fishermen’s Partnership (MFP) who funded the same training program for fishermen in several other areas in the State including Gloucester, Scituate, and at MA Maritime. It has been studied by the Coast Guard and NOAA and received national attention as a model of how to successfully engage fishermen in a safety training program, a noteworthy accomplishment as many past efforts have not been supported by the fishermen themselves.

## Fishing Vessel Safety

Since its inception in 2005 to 2010, the New Bedford safety training program has trained **1,059** fishermen, from Maine to North Carolina, roughly 30% of the fishermen have repeated this training twice or three times. Any fishermen visiting New Bedford while the safety training is scheduled is welcome to attend "we refuse no one". It is generally agreed that there are between 1200 to 1500 fishermen that fish out of the port of New Bedford. Therefore, we have many more fishermen to reach in New Bedford. In addition, we need to have an ongoing program to ensure new fishermen get the training and that there is a refresher course to maintain and reinforce the skills and knowledge learned. Program sustainability will assure greater safety for all our fishermen. The exact number of fishermen that need the training in other parts of MA is not known but is in the several hundreds and the program is equally applicable to them.

There is also considerable in kind support provided by many of the stakeholders including free use of the SMAST facility by UMASS Dartmouth which includes their "tank" for the survival suit training, classrooms, outside facilities for staging fire fighting and damage control, their waterfront pier for the flares, and parking for attendees. The location and convenience of this facility is critical to the success of this program. IMP Fishing Gear LTD. contributes free use and repacking of life rafts, survival equipment, free signal flares, and use of survival suits for fishermen who don't have them.

The Greater New Bedford Massachusetts Fishermen's Safety Training Consortium has been extremely well received by the area fishermen since its implementation, the training sessions has successfully trained 1,059 New England commercial fishermen, observers and Marine Science students and 101 fishermen have gone forward and taken phase II the drill conductor's training.

The result has been fewer at sea casualties and improved response to at sea dangers. Of major significance is that the local fishermen have embraced the program as evidenced by the number of fishermen trained and word of mouth being our primary method of marketing. Although we have had several vessels sink since these safety training classes started the crews have come back to give testimonies that the safety classes played a major role in their survival.

‡ (19 testimonies'; stating that what they learned in the safety training help them to survive.)

## Fishing Vessel Safety

The New Bedford Fishermen Safety Collaborative model uses only Coast Guard Certified Fishing Vessel Safety Trainers who have been designated by each Coast Guard OCMI (Officer in Charge of Marine Inspection) to conduct training within their areas of responsibility.

What make this Fishermen's Safety training successful is that all the safety trainers are connected the fishing industry and know how the fishing industry operates. Outreach is the key component to having a large turnout. Dock outreach starts 30-40 days prior the date set for the class, announcement or newspaper advertisements do-not work as well as face to face contact with fishermen or their families.

Each one of our safety trainer has either lost a family member or close friend in a marine causality. Our hope is to seek funding so we may expand this type of safety training to the smaller fishing ports on the East Coast that do-not get the same attention as New Bedford or Gloucester MA but have the same safety issues. Our fishermen are fishing on an aging fleet with the average vessel in the East coast being 30+ years old which makes safety training so essential.

May you always have a fair wind and calm seas.

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