

Yadava YS, Conway G [2009]. A major prevention programme for mortality in small-scale fishermen in Southern Asia. In: Proceedings of the Fourth International Fishing Industry Safety and Health Conference, May 11-14, 2009, Reykjavik, Iceland. Cincinnati, OH: National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

Administrative Number: HCCA1G
CAN: 0927Z6TH

Title: A major prevention programme for mortality in small-scale fishermen in Southern Asia

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Background

Over 30 million individuals work in commercial fishing operations worldwide. Although <1% of the worldwide workforce, fisherman account for >7% of workplace mortality. In July, 2007, as part of a major multi-nation Safety at Sea effort, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) asked BOBP and APRO/NIOSH to provide technical assistance in enumerating, understanding, and preventing commercial fishing mortality worldwide, particularly focusing in south Asian developing nations around the Bay of Bengal without extant, formal fisherman-mortality surveillance systems. Since then, APRO/NIOSH and BOBP-IGO have collaborated in assessments in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and the Maldives.

Methods

Each assessment has included: 1) on-site fishing community field work in each nation; 2) worker, vessel owner, and employer focus groups in multiple fishing communities in each nation, in developed and remote sites; 3) regional workshops involving germane ministry, fisher associations and NGO representatives from each of the nations; 4) on-site reconnaissance for availability of death records, insurance data, and search and rescue (SAR) data, and 5) abstraction of these data of a sample of available records.

Results

The records and abstracted data were sufficiently detailed to permit analysis for problems potentially amenable to intervention.

Discussion

Initial assessments have not been successfully complete in fishing communities in each nation, and pilot programs being established. Terms of reference have been established with key ministries in each nation, and key findings shared with host governments and FAO.

Conclusion

This major project has high potential for increasing national and international understanding and fostering prevention of fishing-related deaths in south Asia.