



UPDATE

Contact: Terry Hammond (404) 639-3902

April 1994

College Students May be Risking Their Lives on Fishing Vessels *Working in the Alaska Fishing Industry is one of the Nation's Most Hazardous Jobs*

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), commercial fishing in Alaska is one of the most hazardous jobs in the nation. Anyone considering this type of work must be informed of the serious risks they face. Each year, college newspapers across the country run ads offering summer employment in the Alaskan fishing industry. NIOSH is concerned that inexperienced men and women may be entering this extremely hazardous industry with little knowledge of its dangers. NIOSH urges students to find out what safety precautions can increase their chances of returning home alive.

HELP WANTED

ALASKA SUMMER EMPLOYMENT

fisheries. Earn \$600+/week in canneries or \$4,000+/month on fishing boats. Free transportation! Room & Board! Over 8,000 openings. No experience necessary. Male or Female. For employment program call: X-XXX-XXX-XXX ext: XXX

Ads such as this appear in college newspapers across the country.

In 1985 Peter Barry, a college student, traveled to Alaska for a summer job aboard a 70-year-old salmon-fishing vessel. Later that summer, crew members from another boat discovered his body floating in the ocean. The five other crew members on Barry's vessel were never found. According to Jerry Dzigan, Executive Director of the Alaska Marine Safety Education Association, the ship had virtually no safety equipment, no life raft, no survival suits, and no EPIRB [emergency position-indicating radio beacon]. Until the body was found, no one even knew the vessel was in trouble. "What really upset the parents is that none of that [the safety equipment] was required," said Dzigan.

Following the death of their son, Peggy and Robert Barry spearheaded extensive lobbying efforts that led to the passage of the Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Act in 1988. Although the regulations from this act went into effect in 1991, commercial fishing remains a dangerous and too often deadly endeavor.

According to NIOSH Acting Director Richard A. Lemen, nearly 100 workers in the commercial fishing industry have died on the job in the past three years. "Anyone considering employment in this industry must be informed of the risks they may face and not simply lured by the rewards" remarked Lemen.

Last May, NIOSH published an article in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* presenting the most comprehensive statistics to date on commercial fishing fatalities in Alaska. In our continuing efforts to promote commercial fishing safety, this year NIOSH has produced an Alert, entitled *Request for Assistance in Preventing Drownings of Commercial Fishermen*. This Alert reveals that in addition to the loss of life due to vessels capsizing or sinking, many workers die as a result of falling overboard. In several incidents a personal flotation device (PFD) could have kept the victims afloat long enough to be rescued by fellow crew members. NIOSH hopes that by presenting this information and recounting recent tragedies at sea, future fishing fatalities will be prevented. We urgently request your assistance in alerting those at risk of the hazards associated with commercial fishing and of the methods for prevention.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

CDC
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL
AND PREVENTION

How Serious is the Risk?

Alaska has an annual work-related fatality rate for all industries (34.8 worker deaths per 100,000 workers) that is nearly five times greater than that of the entire United States (7.0 worker deaths per 100,000 workers). During the last three years NIOSH researchers have investigated 233 work-related deaths in Alaska alone. Of those deaths, 39.1% took place in the commercial fishing industry, making this one of the most hazardous occupations in the nation. The occupational fatality rate for this industry during the three years examined was 195 worker deaths per 100,000 workers.

Who is at Risk?

Research indicates that the fishermen at greatest risk for death are those who operate aboard unstable vessels and those who have insufficient training in shipboard safety, especially regarding cold water survival techniques and the use of lifesaving equipment. NIOSH reports that prolonged work hours, adverse weather, and other environmental conditions in Alaska are important factors contributing to the dangerous nature of fishing. Workers aboard processor vessels and in canneries also face substantial workplace hazards such as exposure to hazardous equipment and extended work hours.

What Safety Precautions are Needed?

Several factors can increase fishermen's chances of survival on the open sea. By focusing on preventing workers from falling overboard and boats from capsizing and sinking, fewer workers will end up in need of rescue. During the last decade there has been much progress in the development of marine safety equipment and training in the commercial fishing industry. To prevent future tragedies, fishermen and employers must work together to ensure that the following safety precautions are taken:

- Always wear a personal flotation device (PFD) on the vessel deck.
- Make use of safety lines and guard rails where possible; keep decks clear and use nonskid materials to prevent slipping or tripping.
- Train all crew members in the use of safety equipment (for example, survival suits and EPIRBs) and survival techniques.
- Know where safety equipment is located and be sure that it is in proper working order.
- Conduct man-overboard and other safety related drills.
- Ensure vessel stability and proper maintenance.

For copies of the NIOSH Alert, (Publication No. 94-107), *MMWR* article, or a list of qualified organizations that can provide proper training to employers and workers in the commercial fishing industry, call: **1-800-35-NIOSH**

Preventable Alaskan Fishing Fatalities

Below are only a few examples from recent years

On January 22, 1992, a 23-year-old fisherman drowned in the Bering Sea. The man was straddling a crab pot line while working on the deck of the *F/V Magnum*. The line became taut, and the victim was hurled overboard. He was not wearing a PFD.

On February 3, 1992, a 30-year-old fisherman died while working aboard the crabbing vessel, *F/V Sea Venture I*. When the vessel listed heavily and began taking on water, all three crew members abandoned ship. According to the two survivors, the deceased was last seen on deck clutching his survival suit.

On May 26, 1993, two crew members, aged 27 and 30, were washed overboard from the *F/V Sunrise* when the vessel took a large wave on the beam. They were not wearing PFDs. One crew member was recovered but later died. The other has not been located.

On August 7, 1993, the crew of the *F/V Preston Brooks* donned their survival suits and entered the Bering Sea as their vessel sank. Two crewmen were rescued by another vessel. The third, a 62-year-old man, may have survived if his survival suit had been in better condition.

On September 13, 1993 the 58-foot crabbing vessel, *F/V Nettie H*, disappeared and has been declared missing. The vessel sent a distress call and gave their current position. After a 23,000 square mile search, no debris was located and the USCG called off their search. The crew of five, including three brothers, ages 35, 29, and 24, as well as a 35-year old man and a 29-year-old-woman, all experienced fishermen, are presumed drowned.

Successful Rescue

On September 22, 1992, the *F/V Majestic*, a 70-foot vessel with a crew of five, sank in the Bering Sea. The five crewmen donned their survival suits, deployed the life raft and EPIRB, and sent a "Mayday" just as they had practiced in safety drills many times before. The entire crew, after spending several hours trying to stay afloat and warm, was rescued by the Coast Guard.