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EDITORIAL



The Fifth International Fishing Industry Safety and Health Conference (IFISH 5): A Gathering of International Safety and Health Experts in Commercial Fishing, Aquaculture and Seafood Processing

Few occupations are as old, or as hazardous, as commercial fishing. As the global production of seafood continues to rise, the health and safety of workers in not only fishing, but also the expanding aquaculture and seafood processing industries becomes an increasingly important area of research. Currently, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates the worldwide number of fishermen and fish farmers to be 59.7 million, operating a fleet comprising 4.5 million vessels. Workplace health and safety hazards vary greatly, with work settings as various as small vessels to large catcher-processors and manufactured inland ponds to large marine farms in the ocean. Seafood processing includes a variety of processes and can all be done manually or more highly automated. China, Indonesia, India, the United States, and the Russian Federation were the largest seafood producers by volume in 2017.¹ The top aquaculture producers were China, India, Indonesia, Viet Nam, and Bangladesh. It is estimated that 32,000 people lose their lives each year while harvesting seafood.²

Seeing the need for an international dialog between researchers, industry, and worker organizations to decrease injury and illness in the seafood industry, the United States National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) created the International Fishing Industry Safety and Health Conference (IFISH) in 2000. Since then, IFISH continues to be the only international gathering of fishing safety experts and researchers – and this dialog has been critical to advancing safety and health research in the industry. The field of commercial fishing safety and health has expanded considerably in the past few years. We have seen innovations in technology, training curriculum, standards evaluation, fisheries management, and behavior change approaches. For the fifth IFISH conference (IFISH 5), we expanded from focusing only on commercial fishing to also include sessions on occupational safety and health in seafood

processing and aquaculture. IFISH gives us the chance to share these success stories, discuss research methods, and brainstorm solutions for addressing continuing barriers.

In June 2018, over 175 occupational safety and health researchers, safety professionals, industry members, and students from 24 countries gathered in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, to attend IFISH 5. The goal of the conference was to improve safety and health in the commercial fishing, aquaculture, and seafood processing industries through research, innovation, and the exchange of ideas. IFISH 5 started with a day devoted to worker health and safety within the context of international conventions and fisheries management issues including FAO/International Labor Organization/International Maritime Organization safety recommendations, international milestones, and implementation guidelines. On Day 2 and Day 3, maritime health and safety professionals presented on a wide variety of new innovations in personal protective equipment, the latest in injury prevention, bioaerosol exposures, weather events, as well as analyzing injury and illness case files to help the industry understand where, when, and how crewmen are getting sick or injured and best ways to prevent these outcomes. The IFISH 5 conference ended with a half-day closing workshop focusing on the FAO Aquaculture Occupational Health and Safety report. This workshop marked the largest and most comprehensive gathering of aquaculture researchers and provided an opportunity to reflect on both national and international perspectives of occupational safety and health challenges in this unique, but often overlooked, industry.

NIOSH co-sponsored IFISH 5 with Memorial University of Newfoundland, and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United


Nations. Other sponsors included Fishing Partnership Support Services, The Ocean Frontier Institute of Canada, and Workplace NL. The scientific and conference planning committees executed an extremely informative conference, and I personally thank every sponsor and individual involved to make the conference such a success.

This special issue of the Journal of Agromedicine highlights sessions and topic areas discussed during the IFISH 5 conference. Papers cover original research, literature reviews, and session summaries in all three focus areas of commercial fishing, seafood processing, and aquaculture. IFISH 5 created synergy around several important occupational safety and health topics. One article discusses an innovative way to evaluate fisheries management policies and how they affect fishermen's choices and ultimately safety outcomes. A reoccurring theme of IFISH was that fishermen want to be safe, and they will adopt practical and relevant solutions. Many times, it takes someone being willing to act as a connector to get groups talking to identify these practical solutions. An example of this is shown in another paper describing an effective tool created by weather forecasters to help fishermen with specific weather information needed to decide whether to leave port. I was especially inspired in a session on bioaerosols when someone said, "Ok – now what are we going to do about this hazard we've all identified?" These experts decided to write a white paper, included in this special issue, describing the next practical steps that can be taken to reduce this occupational hazard.

IFISH 5 and this special issue have moved occupational safety and health research forward to reduce risk in the commercial fishing, seafood processing, and aquaculture industries. I look forward to the next gathering of researchers and industry experts at IFISH 6 in 2021 (ifishconference.ca). My hope is to generate more discussion around practical and effective interventions and policies to reduce occupational safety and health risk. In addition, I hope IFISH 6 can bring more focus on underserved populations including small-scale fisheries in South America, Asia, and Africa, as well as promising interventions that bring workers home safe to their families.

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