

# Heggers: Building a culture of safety



Teresa Doloff graphic

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From time to time we have an opportunity to thank people for their commitment to safety in commercial fishing. Now is one of those times.

Arn Heggers, who has been the commercial fishing vessel program coordinator in the Coast Guard Marine Safety Office (MSO) in Portland, ME for nearly four years, is moving on. He has accepted a new assignment as a port security specialist for the Coast Guard in Portland.

To date, Arn has logged more than 24 years of active duty as a safety and training professional, inspecting vessels and training others to do the same.



John Feterman/DMR photo

Among his many duties, Arn was involved in the implementation of the Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Regulations from 1992-1995 working with fishermen in Northern Michigan and helping to negotiate an agreement with the Sault Tribe for enforcement of these regulations on tribal fishermen.

When he arrived in Portland in August of 2000, he had just retired from active duty after serving as the commanding officer, captain of the port, officer in charge of marine inspection, and federal on-scene coordinator of the MSO in Chicago, IL.

## Northeast unique

In coming to this region, Arn soon realized that the context for marine safety work was very different from what it had

cold waters, and Nor'easters.

The fishing industry features a sizable fleet, a broad spectrum of gear and boat sizes, and a disparity in terms of safety requirements stemming from whether vessels are documented or state registered.

Fishermen are often third or fourth generation with a deep knowledge of the water, a burned-in love of fishing, and a staunch belief that fishing is inherently dangerous.

The geography, the fleet size, and the predominant culture that tends to think "Accidents happen ... It's a dangerous business," made it difficult for Arn and other MSO Portland vessel examiners to promote and manage a voluntary dockside exam program in some places.

## Building partnerships

His goal, Arn said, was "to increase the outreach efforts so that fishermen would see the benefits of getting a trained safety professional to help them improve their safety."

Over his four years in Portland, he built and sustained partnering relationships with the Maine Fishermen's Wives, the Alaska Marine Safety Education Association (AMSEA) for drill conductor training, Seafarer's Friend, McMillan Offshore, the Department of Marine Resources/Maine Marine Patrol (MMP), Maine Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Commercial Fisheries News*, the city of Portland, industry organizations, marine surveyors, and the Harvard School of Public Health.

He participated with fishermen, regulators, government agencies, and academia in Gov. Angus King's Task Force on Commercial Fishing Safety, which led to the establishment of the Commercial Fishing Safety Advisory Council that is now legislatively

fleet, was instrumental in getting seven MMP vessels examined and outfitted with proper safety equipment and decals, and made it possible for nine MMP boat specialists to become certified drill conductors.

High School teacher Tom Duym attended one of the drill conductor's training sessions presented in Maine by AMSEA with support from Arn, the ME Department of Marine Resources, and the Coast Guard. Now, Duym incorporates what he learned into his marine technology course at the Deer Isle-Stonington High School.

Arn feels strongly that teaching young fishermen about safe practices and risk reduction will help build a culture of safety in the fishing industry that, in turn, will reduce the number of injuries and fatalities in the industry.

## Our turn

We want to thank Arn for his constant vigilance and commitment

to commercial fishing safety.

As he has said many times, we all share responsibility for ensuring that the industry moves forward to incorporate safe practices and reduce risks.

We need to continue his concerted effort to make safety an important and high priority. Arn Heggers promoted this initiative. It's up to us to continue it. ■

## Arn Heggers' FISH SAFE tips

- Make safety a priority.
- If you are a fisherman, seek the resources of safety professionals.
- Encourage young people to learn safe practices.
- Encourage efforts in your community to build a culture of safety in the fishing industry.

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than 24 years of active duty as a safety and training professional, inspecting vessels and training others to do the same.

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When he arrived in Portland in August of 2000, he had just retired from active duty after serving as the commanding officer, captain of the port, officer in charge of marine inspection, and federal on-scene coordinator of the MSO in Chicago, IL.

**Northeast unique**

In coming to this region, Arn soon realized that the context for marine safety work was very different from what it had been in Illinois.

Here, fishing is a way of life in hundreds of rural coastal communities spread along 3,000-plus miles of coastline characterized by rugged coastal terrain,

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He participated with fishermen, regulators, government agencies, and academia in Gov. Angus King's Task Force on Commercial Fishing Safety, which led to the establishment of the Commercial Fishing Safety Advisory Council that is now legislatively constituted with members appointed by Gov. Baldacci.

Arn was successful in hiring an additional commercial fishing vessel safety examiner to cover the Downeast

conductors. High School teacher Tom Duym attended one of the drill conductor's training sessions presented in Maine by AMSEA with support from Arn, the ME Department of Marine Resources, and the Coast Guard. Now, Duym incorporates what he learned into his marine technology course at the Deer Isle-Stonington High School.

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