

Who survives? Recent incidents offer insights

Early in February, the New England Fishery Management Council agreed to establish a safety committee to reassess all of the council's fishery management plans "to ensure they do not ... contain rules that could have unintended consequences."

There is merit in the idea that regulations should reinforce – not discourage – safe fishing and the move to study the relationship between regulations and safety is an excellent step forward.

However, there is a complementary requirement for fishermen and captains to assess their fishing practices from a safety perspective.

Looking at the table "Rescue from Water Incidents," which summarizes recent fishing vessel mishaps, we can see clearly that all of those who survived were rescued from a life raft and most of them had on survival suits.

The sequence of events leading up to these rescues did not occur by chance:

- The survival suits were serviceable and available because the vessel owner had complied with the requirements of the Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Act (CFVSA) of 1988. The life rafts were serviceable for the same reason.

- The captain of the Diane Marie, who assisted in the Northern Edge case, knew how to make a rescue. The Coast Guard helicopter pilots and divers studied and practiced over and over again to sharpen their search and rescue skills.

- In compliance with the CFVSA, the crew members of the Enterprise had participated in "abandon ship" drills two days prior to the vessel's onboard fire and had passed a dockside exam before that. When the fire broke out they knew how to proceed in an orderly, safe manner.

New, wearable PFDs

We can make one other observation

resist wearing bulky PFDs while working on deck. However, there are new inflatable PFDs that offer slim, lightweight options.

Suspenders makes vests with manual and auto/manual inflate mechanisms. Stormy Seas makes a wide variety of inflatable jackets, rain gear, and vests.

You can easily check out the offerings of both companies by asking about them at your local gear supply store or by visiting their web sites at <www.suspenders.com> and <www.stormyseas.com>.

There are cautions, however. Only some inflatables are approved by the Coast Guard. In fact, the Coast Guard announced a recall in 2002 of certain Suspenders with the Hammar model MAI manual/auto inflating mechanism.

Stormy Seas has not sought Coast Guard approval because, as a manufacturer, the company stresses "that no boater should have only an inflatable PFD available for use aboard any commercial or recreational vessel."

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The company's reasoning stems from the fact that the inflatable PFDs require maintenance and proper handling in order to be ready for service and its concern that boaters and fishermen may not remember or take the time to do this maintenance.

Stormy Seas suggests that mariners use inflatables along with foam PFDs, meaning that fishermen would wear an inflatable PFD while working, but that buoyant PFDs that meet Coast Guard requirements would still be immediately available for each person on board.

This is a strategy that could make a difference in the outcome of fishing vessel accidents in which people go overboard.

FISH SAFE:

- Check out the new inflatable PFDs.
- Wear PFD protection while working.
- Meet safety requirements by servicing rafts, testing EPIRBs, and holding drills.
- Request a voluntary dockside exam.
- Meet CFVSA standards, even if you are not required to do so.

Rescue from Water Incidents Dec. 20, 2004-Feb. 9, 2005

Prepared by Ann Backus

| Fishing Vessel | Date/ Description | PFD/ Survival Suit (SS) worn? | Life Raft/ Rescue | Fatalities/ Survivors |
|----------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Northern Edge | Dec. 20, 2004 Sank | 6 without PFDs or SSs | 1 in raft/ F/V Diane Marie rescue | 5 Fatalities 1 Survivor |
| Chico Bravo | Jan. 19, 2005 Sank | Without PFDs/SSs | 2 in raft/ F/V Captain Collet/USCG rescue | 2 Survivors |
| Legacy | Jan. 20, 2005 Man overboard | Without PFD/SS | No | 1 Fatality |
| Enterprise | Feb. 1, 2005 | 3 with SSs; 1 without PFD/SS | 4 in raft/ | 1 Fatality (cardiac arrest) |

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● In compliance with the CFVSA, the crew members of the Enterprise had participated in "abandon ship" drills two days prior to the vessel's onboard fire and had passed a dockside exam before that. When the fire broke out they knew how to proceed in an orderly, safe manner.

New, wearable PFDs

We can make one other observation about these incidents – if everyone who was not wearing a survival suit had been wearing a personal flotation device (PFD), the probability of survival may have been better.

Understandably, almost all fishermen

More ATCs

Continued from previous page

scene with the survivors until Coast Guard crews arrived to complete the rescue and provide medical support."

Crewmen aboard the Gloucester-based Miss Trish II were fishing for groundfish about 20 miles off Cape Cod late in December when something unusual turned up in the net – a red tapestry purse.

Inside, they found cash and personal items. After joking around about how they would split up the haul, they decided to return the contents to the bag's owner.

Jane Russo, wife of Miss Trish II's captain Vincent Russo, carefully dried out the credit cards, makeup, keys, photos, papers, and money, then wrapped the items up and mailed them to owner Arlene Sulkes-Spieler in Fort Lauderdale, FL.

Sulkes-Spieler told a local newspaper that she was "flabbergasted" to receive the package. She responded by sending a thank you note along with money to cover the postage and a \$200 cash reward.

But Russo and his crew still had some generosity to spare. Instead of keeping the reward, they donated the money to victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami. /cfn/

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| Legacy | Jan. 20, 2005 Man overboard | Without PFD/SS | No | 1 Fatality |
| Enterprise | Feb. 1, 2005 Fire | 3 with SSs; 1 without PFD/SS; Drill conducted | 4 in raft/ USCG rescue | 1 Fatality (cardiac arrest) 3 Survivors |
| Hollywood | Feb. 9, 2005 Sank | 2 with SSs; 1 without PFD/SS | 3 in raft/ USCG rescue | 3 Survivors |

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