

Survival suit, dockside exam save fisherman

On Nov 26, John Sanfilippo was fishing 12 miles southeast of Gloucester when he noticed black smoke coming from the engine room. He opened the engine room door to investigate and was instantly hit in the face by a blast of hot smoke.

Nearly simultaneously he heard radio messages from nearby boats alerting him that black smoke from his 47' Giovanna was visible across the water.

Sanfilippo quickly realized he had no time to radio for help. He grabbed his survival suit from the pilothouse, ran to the stern, and put it on. Then he tried to go back toward the pilot house, but when he saw that it was engulfed in flames returned to the stern, which was already swamped, and jumped into the 47°F water.

The master of the Angela Rose alerted the Coast Guard to the crisis at 9:17 am. Soon after, the crew of the Carla Maria pulled 60-year-old Sanfilippo from the water.

When two Coast Guard boats arrived

on scene at 9:41 am, an officer boarded the Carla Maria and evaluated Sanfilippo. He was then safely transported to the shore by the Coast Guard and taken to a Beverly hospital where he was found to have second- and third-degree burns on his face.

Lessons learned

John Sanfilippo is alive and recovering because he heeded advice given during a Coast Guard voluntary dockside exam several weeks before. The examiner told him that he should store his survival suit in the pilothouse rather than in the engine room.

Sanfilippo and his wife, Angela, want all fishermen to know that a Coast Guard dockside exam should be scheduled at least every year, and that the recommendations of the examiner should be followed without delay and *before* the next fishing trip.

Beyond that, Angela Sanfilippo, president of the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association, said each fisherman should make sure his survival suit fits *currently* and should practice putting it on—feet first without shoes, followed by left arm, hood, right arm, and face covering.

As we have mentioned in this column before, it is important to remember to cover your head with the inboard arm, place the other hand across the face mask and cross legs when jumping into the water. A complete "Suit-up for Survival Checklist" is available

from the Coast Guard and in the October 2004 edition of *Commercial Fisheries News*.

Fire damage

According to his wife, Sanfilippo kept expecting to see his life raft pop open while he was awaiting rescue from the water. It never did.

The Coast Guard later retrieved the raft, which had been serviced within the last year. When the Sanfilippos inspected it on land, they realized that the plastic case had been fused shut by the heat of the fire.

Similar heat and fire damage could also explain why the Coast Guard never received an EPIRB signal from the Giovanna.

Fire also singed the back of Sanfilippo's survival suit, but fortunately the fabric remained intact, and he was completely dry when rescued.

Next steps

This experience has prompted Angela Sanfilippo to approach her life-long commitment to the safety and well-being of fishermen with renewed vigor. Within days of the accident, she and a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary began working to create a fishing family checklist.

This checklist is designed to help land-based relatives ensure a fisherman's safety on the water, provide accurate information to the Coast Guard in the event of an accident, and provide vessel

documents in the event of a loss.

I will be collaborating with them in the development and dissemination of this checklist, and it will be available in early January through *Commercial Fisheries News* and local fishermen's wives organizations.

In addition to safety reminders for fishermen, the checklist will include guidance on making sure your family knows your vessel's markings and whereabouts, and where to find the originals of vessel documents kept safely at home. ■

Commercial Fisheries News wishes to thank Angela Sanfilippo for her thoughtful interview with Ann Backus in preparation for this article.

FISH SAFE:

- Schedule a dockside exam if you haven't had one in the last eight months.
- Try on your survival suit.
- Run through the abandon-ship process, at least mentally.
- Consider buying a personal EPIRB or a GPIRB with GPS capability.
- Make sure your family and friends know your vessel's whereabouts and markings and how to find your vessel documents.



John Sanfilippo was forced to abandon ship when his 47' wooden dragger Giovanna was engulfed in flames. The boat burned and sank.