

Officials credit drills for crew's survival

On Oct. 4, 2007, New Bedford Mayor Scott Lang publicly praised the captain and crewmembers of Jacob Alan, a 70' fishing vessel, for their bravery.

The Jacob Alan sank off of Nantucket on Sept. 28. The five fishermen and one National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) observer on board survived the catastrophic event because they used the knowledge they gained from safety training courses and from an abandon-ship drill they conducted the day before the sinking.

A triple mayday call on VHF radio plus activation of two EPIRBs – one belonging to the vessel and one a personal EPIRB belonging to the fisheries observer – alerted the Coast Guard First District Command Center in Boston to the Jacob Alan's distress.

The fishing vessel Sancor heard a subsequent radio broadcast from the command center and was able to rescue all six individuals from their life raft.

Key factors

Several factors were involved in the successful rescue of those aboard the Jacob Alan.

First, not only had the vessel's captain and another crewmember completed safety training offered by the city of New Bedford in 2005, they had maintained their survival equipment in operable condition and registered the vessel's EPIRB as required.

Second, they held an abandon-ship drill

the day before the sinking and rehearsed the roles each would play in the event of an emergency. They also practiced using emergency equipment such as the life raft and immersion suits.

Third, the Jacob Alan had complied with a NMFS regulation effective May 1, 2006 that requires every vessel carrying a NMFS observer to have a dockside exam decal from the Coast Guard that is no more than two years old. Also, the rules require the observer to make a safety inspection of the vessel, discuss emergency procedures with the crew, and participate in drills.

The fact that the observer had participated in fishing safety training for two days as part of a three-week course for observers and participated in the Jacob Alan's crew drill ensured that she was prepared to activate her personal EPIRB and knew how to abandon-ship safely.

Safety training

The Commercial Fishing Industry Vessel Safety Act of 1988 specifies that a drill conductor hold the following drills at least once every month: abandoning the vessel; fighting a fire; recovering a person overboard; stabilizing the vessel after unintentional flooding; launching and recovery of survival craft; donning immersion suits, PFDs, fireman's outfit, and SCBA, which stands for "self-contained breathing apparatus;" making a

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radio distress call and using visual distress signals; activating the general alarm; and reporting all inoperative alarms and fire detection systems.

Intensive safety training designed to certify fishermen as drill conductors includes these elements at a minimum. The best training provides hands-on drills and thorough rehearsals of emergency scenarios and is offered by private companies and fishermen's groups.

If the experience of fishermen engaging in these kinds of drills is not personally familiar to you, it is time to take a safety course to help ensure that you can rescue yourself and others in an emergency situation.

Dockside exams are easily arranged through your local Coast Guard Marine Safety Office by calling the following examiners:

- Northern Maine – Garry Moores, (207)-733-2054;
- Maine/New Hampshire – Kevin Plowman, (207) 780-3256;
- Newburyport to Manomet, MA – John



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Buckley, (617) 223-3045;

- Provincetown, MA to Watch Hill, RI – Kevin Coyle, (508) 991-6812;
- Connecticut and Long Island Sound – Mark Dixon, (203) 468-4437; and
- New York and northern New Jersey – (718) 354-3168.

To find an examiner in Coast Guard District 5 – southern New Jersey to North Carolina – call Bob Garrott at (757) 398-8554 or e-mail him at <Robert.G.Garrot@uscg.mil>.

FISH SAFE:

- Arrange for a voluntary dockside exam periodically.
- Maintain and know how to use all emergency equipment.
- Inspect your vessel before each trip.
- Enroll in a safety training course and conduct drills, even if not required to do so.

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