

# CG District 1 casualties offer safety lessons

The First District Coast Guard logged 349 general "casualties" for 2007. In this context, casualty means an incident that the Coast Guard investigates. The closest any year has come to this number of casualties was 1997 when there were 307. A number of these were preventable. The accompanying table shows the different types of casualties.

For 2007, the number of EPIRB-related casualties – meaning false alarms – was 73. In other years, EPIRB-related casualties were lower. For example, in 1999 the district logged 271 casualties and only 20 of them were EPIRB-related.

In 2008, in an effort to understand the causes of these EPIRB casualties, District 1 began keeping a separate log to collect information about EPIRB activations. The list of probable causes of false activation includes icing, battery removal, sea spray, removal to a shipyard without disabling the unit, transfer of title

to a new owner without disabling the unit, and malfunction.

Just remembering to disengage the EPIRB unit when changing owners or dry-docking your vessel can save the Coast Guard numerous search and rescue missions.

The number of injuries and medevacs for 2007 totaled 35. Eight of these involved heart and/or high blood pressure situations and eight involved finger, bone, or musculoskeletal injuries. There were three seizures, three allergic reactions, three passing out/collapsing incidents, one man overboard, one carbon monoxide exposure, and eight other injuries not described.

## Terminations

The high number of voyage terminations continues to be a concern. The good news is that in 2007 there were 34 terminations compared to 46 in 2006.

In 2007, 16 of the terminations involved vessels cited for noncompliance with life raft/buoyant apparatus requirements. Several were cited for noncompliant survival suits, fire extinguishers, flares, and/or EPIRBs.

## Most dangerous

Overall from 1993 to 2008, the most dangerous fisheries in the district were trawler and lobster followed by scallop and clam. Trawlers carry large spools of netting, lobster boats set and haul traps with long lengths of rope, and scallopers carry chain nets deployed from a variety of superstructures. All of these fishing methods are potentially hazardous.

In terms of casualty type, sinking leads the list followed by man overboard and capsized.

A dockside fishing vessel safety exam can reduce the risk of sinking because the examiner checks hull integrity, lazarette tightness, bilge and high water alarms,

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Theresa Dolloff graphic

how much weight is added to the vessel by booms, hoists, nets, drags, and ice present above the water line.

## Training

After the December 2004 Northern Edge disaster, safety training sessions were offered in New Bedford, and some sessions were so heavily attended that there was standing room only. Since then, the Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership, Massachusetts Sea Grant, and the Coast Guard have joined forces to hold trainings in ports, including New Bedford, Gloucester, and Hull.

In Maine, John McMillan of McMillan Offshore Survival Training in Belfast has been busy conducting trainings every week. The practice and information provided through these trainings is precisely what is needed to survive a sinking, man-overboard, or capsized event.

As the statistics show, the collective effort of the fishing community seems to be helping to reduce the number of deaths at sea. For the period 1993-2007, fishing deaths totaled 77 for the first seven years and 48 for the last seven years. Hopefully, that indicates that the "culture of safety" that has been talked about for years by safety experts is finally starting to take hold in the fishing industry. ■

## FISH SAFE:

- Schedule a voluntary dockside exam.
- Organize and attend a training

*Table 1: Tally of Vessel Casualties\* – USCG District 1 for the Year 2007*

Casualty Type	Number
EPIRB	73
Injury/Medevac	35
Tow	29
Aground	19
Fire	5
Weather	2
Disabled	59
Terminations	35
Sunk	25
Equipment	12
Collision	4
Deaths	8

\* An incident the CG investigates

*Table 2: Casualties\* by Fishery and by Type – 1993-2008 (through March 18, 2008, USCG District 1)*

Casualty	Number
<b>By Fishery</b>	
Trawler	46
Lobster	35
Scallop	22
Clams	19
<b>By Type of Casualty</b>	



PHOTO



The value of training and practice.

and clam. Trawlers carry large spools of netting, lobster boats set and haul traps with long lengths of rope, and scallopers carry chain nets deployed from a variety of superstructures. All of these fishing methods are potentially hazardous.

In terms of casualty type, sinking leads the list followed by man overboard and capsized.

A dockside fishing vessel safety exam can reduce the risk of sinking because the examiner checks hull integrity, lazarette tightness, bilge and high water alarms, and more. To reduce the risk of capsized, fishermen need to arm themselves with an understanding of their vessel's stability parameters, load lines, and proper loading strategies, and how stability is impacted by how bait, fish, and ice are stored and

be helping to reduce the number of deaths at sea. For the period 1993-2007, fishing deaths totaled 77 for the first seven years and 48 for the last seven years. Hopefully, that indicates that the "culture of safety" that has been talked about for years by safety experts is finally starting to take hold in the fishing industry. ■

### FISH SAFE:

- Schedule a voluntary dockside exam.
- Organize and attend a training session in your community – include teenagers.
- Practice safe fishing habits every time you go out.

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<b>By Fishery</b>	
Trawler	46
Lobster	35
Scallop	22
Clams	19
<b>By Type of Casualty</b>	
Sinking	47
Man Overboard	33
Capsized	20
Heart Attack	12



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