March 30, 2022   Findings of Concern 005-22
Lewes, Delaware

PRACTICE SPEAR GUN SAFETY – IT COULD SAVE LIVES!

Purpose. The U.S. Coast Guard issues findings of concern to disseminate information related to unsafe conditions that were identified as causal factors in a casualty and could contribute to future incidents. Findings of concern are intended to educate the public, state, or local agencies about the conditions discovered so they may address the findings with an appropriate voluntary action or highlight existing applicable company policies or state/local regulations.

The Incident. On September 2, 2018, four recreational spear fishermen where fishing in the Atlantic Ocean approximately six miles off the shore of Fenwick Island, Delaware. While loading the spear gun on board the vessel a spear inadvertently discharged fatally striking one of the fishermen.

Contributing Factors and Analysis. The investigation identified the following causal factors:

1. Failure to follow manufacturer's instructions to never load a spear gun outside of the water, but to always load a spear gun under water.

2. Failure to use a safety-loading device while loading a spear gun.

Findings of Concern. Coast Guard Investigators have identified the following measures that, if implemented by owner/operators of vessels, may mitigate the risk posed by these contributing factors:

- Closely follow all spear gun manufacturer's instructions including never loading a spear gun out of the water.

- Use all safety equipment recommended by spear gun manufacturers while loading a spear gun.

Closing. These findings of concern are provided for informational purpose only and do not relieve any domestic or international safety, operational, or material requirements. For any questions or comments, please contact Marine Safety Detachment Lewes by phone at 302-644-1909 or by email at msdlewes@uscg.mil.