

Issue 10AE

Fishing Vessel Drill Conductors

There is no doubt that commercial fishing is a very dangerous occupation. Fishing fatality rates vary by type of fishery. The evolution of the fishing industry has been accompanied by changes in vessel design, construction and equipment, as well as in fishing operations and safety at sea. Technical developments accelerate this process with widespread use of better engines, hydraulics for hauling gear and catches, synthetic nets and lines, fish finding electronics and refrigeration equipment. This has led to increased productivity. Although fishing may be less dangerous today than in the past, fishers still face the risk of death on the job that is 25 to 30 times greater than any other occupation.

Some factors rendering fishing one of the most dangerous occupations in the U.S. are:

- type of fishing operation and competition;
- affects on profitability from equipment costs and product prices;
- impact of reduced crew size on work loads and fatigue;
- fisheries management decisions; and
- level of crew training, experience and skills.

Safety and survival training is not optional. A rapid response to emergency situations is best assured when crews are familiar with survival equipment and procedures to be followed when problems develop. Emergency instructions and practicing drills for various contingencies is the responsibility of every crewmember. The master or individual in charge is required by regulation to ensure that drills are conducted and instruction is given to each individual at least once each month as set forth in 46 CFR 28.270.

Emergency instructions may be provided in conjunction with drills to ensure that each individual is familiar with their duties and their responses to at least the following contingencies:

- (1) Abandoning the vessel;
- (2) Fighting a fire in different locations on board the vessel;
- (3) Recovering an individual from the water;
- (4) Minimizing the effects of unintentional flooding;
- (5) Launching survival craft and recovering lifeboats and rescue boats;
- (6) Donning immersion suits and other wearable personal flotation devices;
- (7) Donning a fireman's outfit and a self-contained breathing apparatus, if the vessel is so equipped;

- (8) Making a voice radio distress call and using visual distress signals;
- (9) Activating the general alarm; and
- (10) Reporting inoperative alarm systems and fire detection systems.

Drills must be conducted on board the vessel as if there were an actual emergency and must include all individuals on board your vessel. Emergency equipment must be used, alarms and detection systems must be tested, and immersion suits and protective clothing must be donned if the vessel is so equipped.



Drills must be conducted and instruction provided by an individual trained in the proper procedures for conducting the activity - that means by a Fishing Vessel Drill Conductor who has been trained by Fishing Vessel Safety Instructor. Safety Instructors must be accepted by the local Coast Guard Officer-in-Charge of Marine Inspection (OCMI) and hold a valid Letter of Acceptance. A Fishing Vessel Drill Conductor must have documentation showing successful completion of an accepted or standardized course of training on personal survival and emergency drills. There are many organizations and individuals around the country who are qualified and accepted to train Drill Conductors.

“Knowledge is power.” So, make sure you participate in emergency instruction and drills on your vessel. Learn the skills you will need to survive. Practice, and then practice some more so you know your role and responsibilities, and your response in an emergency will be instinctive and automatic. Demand that your Drill Conductor make drills realistic, require use of the emergency equipment, require testing of alarms and detection systems, and require donning of protective clothing and immersion suits/PFDs. Training and drills are an investment in your life and for those who care about you. What you get from a Drill Conductor can make the difference when seconds count.

