



MARINE SAFETY ALERT

Inspections and Compliance Directorate

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Washington, DC

Safety Alert 04-02

UNDERWAY AND NO LOOKOUT

It was one of those days in Southeast Alaska when boaters rush to the water to enjoy the splendor of the day. The weather was calm and the visibility was excellent. Two men were anchored off The Sisters Island near Hoonah in their 21-foot vessel, fishing for halibut. One of them looked up and saw a fishing vessel headed directly toward them. Startled, he looked again, and couldn't see signs of anyone in the pilothouse or anywhere on the vessel. He asked his fishing partner and they agreed there was no one in sight. The fishing vessel was still headed directly toward them. The fishing vessel's name could easily be read, so they tried to contact the vessel on the VHF radio to request they alter their course. No one answered the calls and the vessel's course remained steady, despite repeated urgent calls. The boaters decided their best course of action would be to immediately start the motor and swing on the anchor to avoid a collision. They were able to move their stern out of the way just as the fishing vessel motored by. As the fishing vessel passed, the crew on the stern could be seen baiting hooks and waving at them, completely oblivious to the narrow escape they had just had.

There are "Ready for Sea" safety factors that are relevant to this incident and several "lessons learned".

- All vessels must maintain a proper lookout at all times. You may think you can see an approaching vessel because there are three of you working gear on the stern, but that isn't possible. A proper lookout means there is someone looking where the vessel is traveling at all times. This is especially critical when transiting heavy traffic zones or where recreational vessels usually anchor. In addition, a lookout while at anchor can save your vessel, as it did in this situation and possibly your life.
- Maintain a constant radio watch. Keep the radio turned on. Keep the volume high enough to hear any calls. If working on deck, mount a speaker outside where you can hear radio calls. It just might save your life, or that of others.
- Be prepared to warn an approaching vessel of your presence. Don't rely exclusively on radio communications. Always be ready to sound an air horn or flash a light-anything to draw attention.
- The anchored vessel did the right thing by moving out of the path of the fishing vessel. Never "assume" the other vessel will change course. Be prepared to take evasive action to prevent a collision. Remember the obligation of ALL mariners at ALL times is to take appropriate action to avoid a collision.

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