



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

MARINE SAFETY ALERT

Inspections and Compliance Directorate

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Safety Alert 08-97

FISHING VESSEL LIFESAVING EQUIPMENT

The purpose of this safety alert is to remind the commercial fishing industry of the requirements and importance of lifesaving equipment for commercial fishing industry vessels.

Recently an uninspected 69-foot commercial fishing vessel, with three people on board, caught on fire and sank at approximately 40 miles offshore in the Gulf of Mexico. The vessel's crew tried to fight the fire with portable extinguishers, but were unsuccessful. They then requested assistance from nearby vessels, donned life preservers, and tried to deploy the vessel's emergency positioning indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) and inflatable liferaft. According to the only survivor, the EPIRB may have sunk after it was thrown overboard and the liferaft could not be inflated. The cause of these equipment failures is under investigation by Coast Guard Marine Safety Unit Galveston.

Based on the vessel's length, its operation, location and the number of people on board, Title 46 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 25 26-5 requires similar vessels to have on board a float-free, automatically activated Category 1 406 MHz EPIRB stowed in a manner so that it will float-free if the vessel sinks. The vessel is also required to have an inflatable liferaft by 46 CFR Table 28.120(a). Additionally, Coast Guard requirements for scheduled maintenance and inspection of lifesaving equipment are listed in 46 CFR Table 98.140.

The Coast Guard is striving to improve the commercial fishing industry's safety record. Coast Guard fishing vessel safety examiners are available to assist operators in understanding Commercial Fishing Industry Vessel regulations. Operators are highly encouraged to contact their local Marine Safety Offices to schedule a voluntary dockside examination for their vessels. Voluntary dockside examinations are no fault and non-adversarial. They can help prevent occurrence of similar tragic incidents.

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