



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

MARINE SAFETY ALERT

Inspections and Compliance Directorate

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Safety Alert 10-02

MAN OVERBOARD

The following information is a product of the [Seventeenth Coast Guard District's Fishing Vessel Safety Program](#). The lessons learned related to this alert may be applicable to other segments of maritime industry.

The Incident

A 138 foot catcher/processor vessel had been assisting in the search for two missing crewmembers from another catcher/processor that had caught fire and exploded two days earlier. It became apparent to the master of vessel that the Coast Guard would soon be suspending the search as the weather deteriorated to 30 foot seas and 50 knot winds.

The master decided to seek shelter in Dutch Harbor, Alaska and deliver the two survivors they had previously rescued. In addition to the survivors, they had picked up the survival craft to the damaged vessel and secured it on deck. However, as they headed for Dutch Harbor it broke loose and started shifting around.

Three crewmembers were sent out to secure the craft and prevent it from going overboard. While the men were securing the equipment, a large wave broke across the deck and swept one individual overboard. A second crewman was also caught by the same wave but saved himself by grabbing hold of the vessel's railing.

The missing crewman was wearing black rain gear and no flotation aids. Although a search was performed the master and crew were unable to locate and rescue the missing crewman. The Coast Guard was also notified and launched a helicopter from St. Paul. The aerial search was unsuccessful and hindered by snow squalls and half mile visibility.

Lessons Learned

Although the specific cause of the casualty remains under investigation, there are ["Ready for Sea"](#) safety factors that are relevant to this incident and several "lessons learned."

- Wear a personal flotation device (PFD) when working or moving around on deck. Even if you only expect to be on deck for a few minutes, grab a PFD and put it over your rain gear. Or wear an inflatable PFD. If you fall overboard, at least you'll stay afloat.
- Sew or glue retroreflective tape to outerwear-rain gear, work jackets, sweat shirts, etc. Light will reflect off the reflective tape providing a more visible target for rescuers.

- Wear bright colors when you must work on deck. Choose bright, contrasting colors that will easily catch someone's eye. It could mean the difference in someone spotting you or not amongst the waves.
- Wear a light on your PFD or clothing - or carry one that can be pinned on in an emergency. Search efforts at night or in inclement weather are very challenging for searchers. Anything that you can do to attract attention to yourself, such as having a bright strobe light on, will aid rescuers in quickly finding you. And in the Bering Sea, every minute matters!
- Wear a safety harness when the weather is extreme and you must go out on deck. Rig safety lines in exposed areas on deck. It is not uncommon to lose your footing in heavy breaking seas, and the safety line may be the one thing that keeps you from going over the side!
- Properly secure fishing gear and survival equipment.
- Thoroughly analyze the risk when weighing the importance of saving material items. Equipment can be replaced - a life cannot.

Questions regarding this incident may be addressed to Ms. Sue Jorgensen at sjorgensen@cgalaska.uscg.mil.

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