



FINDINGS OF CONCERN

Sector Western Alaska and U.S. Arctic

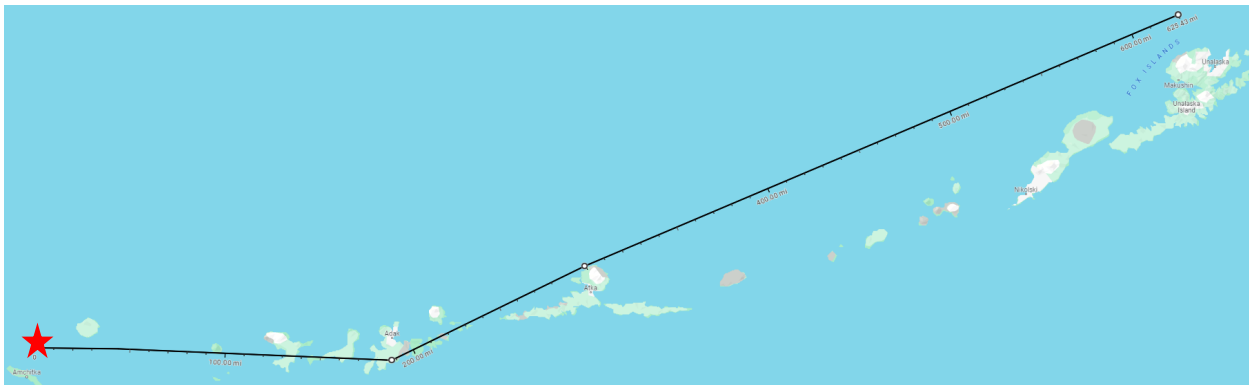
October 29, 2024
Anchorage, AK

Findings of Concern 009-24

NORTH PACIFIC PREPAREDNESS AND PRECAUTIONS

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. In December of 2023, a commercial fishing vessel was operating along the Aleutian Chain, approximately 7 nautical miles (nm) north of Amchitka Island and over 500 nautical miles southwest of Dutch Harbor, Alaska. The operator of the vessel discovered that some discarded fishing gear had become entangled with his own fishing gear and attempted to haul it onboard for the safety of others. While doing so, the vessel's propeller became fouled with submerged portions of the fishing line, which was invisible from the surface, and the vessel became disabled. Now adrift, the vessel requested assistance from another vessel (owned by the same company) and the U.S. Coast Guard. The assist vessel was more than 290 nm / 36 hours away and the nearest Coast Guard asset capable of providing an emergency tow was responding to a separate incident more than 500 nm / 48 hours away. When the company's other fishing vessel arrived on scene to assist, the vessel operators created an improvised towing system that combined mooring lines and an anchor chain. This temporary arrangement held until the Coast Guard Cutter arrived and towed the vessel to the nearest safe harbor in Adak, Alaska.



Red star indicates the primary location of the casualty and is measured relative to the Port of Dutch Harbor / Unalaska, AK.

Contributing Factors and Analysis. Once the assist vessel established a tow with the disabled vessel, the vessels were unable to make progress towards a safe refuge due to environmental conditions on scene and an ineffective towing arrangement. Crewmembers on both vessels expressed concerns with the established towing configuration; however, no one possessed the training or experience to assemble a safe and effective towing arrangement. While awaiting the arrival of the Coast Guard asset and other company resources, the on-scene weather conditions



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significantly deteriorated which further slowed response times and increased risk for subsequent adverse events, such as grounding, pollution, or loss of power. Although commercial fishing industry vessels are not, by definition, towing vessels, in the Bering Sea and North Pacific Ocean, there is a high probability that other fishing vessels could be the closest resource available to provide emergency towing assistance within a reasonable timeframe.

Findings of Concern. Coast Guard investigators have identified the following voluntary actions for owners & operators of similar vessels to consider in order to reduce the likelihood of recurrence:

- Approach hazards in the water with the utmost care and consider methods that reduce the likelihood of fouling the propeller, including shifting engines into neutral well in advance of the approach, utilizing boat hooks, or deploying a more maneuverable vessel such as a skiff / small boat. Commercial fishing vessels should consider the development of an emergency towing plan and conduct appropriate training and drills to ensure the crew is familiar with the equipment and arrangements outlined.
- Consider carrying a satellite phone or other means of long-range communication beyond VHF/HF radio when operating in remote regions, and to always monitor Channel 16 and local channels. Vessels with long range communication capabilities can assist other less capable vessels and provide a critical communications link between those less capable vessels and shore-based resources when emergencies arise.

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 Sector Western Alaska and U.S. Arctic Investigations Division by phone at (907) 428-4200, or by email at WesternAlaskaIO@uscg.mil.