



UPDATE

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College Students May be Risking Their Lives on Fishing Vessels

Working in the Alaska Fishing Industry is one of the Nation's Most Hazardous Jobs

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), commercial fishing in Alaska is one of the most hazardous jobs in the nation. Anyone considering this type of work must be informed of the serious risks they face. Each year, college newspapers across the country run ads offering summer employment in the Alaskan fishing industry. NIOSH is concerned that inexperienced men and women may be entering this extremely hazardous industry with little knowledge of its dangers. NIOSH urges students to find out what safety precautions can increase their chances of returning home alive.

HELP WANTED

ALASKA SUMMER EMPLOYMENT

fisheries. Earn \$600+/week in canneries or \$4,000+/month on fishing boats. Free transportation! Room & Board! Over 8,000 openings. No experience necessary. Male or Female. For employment program call: X-XXX-XXX-XXX ext: XXX

Ads such as this appear in college newspapers across the country.

In 1985 Peter Barry, a college student, traveled to Alaska for a summer job aboard a 70-year-old salmon-fishing vessel. Later that summer, crew members from another boat discovered his body floating in the ocean. The five other crew members were never found. According to Jerry Dzugan, Executive Director of the Alaska Marine Safety Education Association, the ship had virtually no safety equipment, no life raft, no survival suits, and no EPIRB [emergency position-indicating radio beacon]. Until the body was found, no one even knew the vessel was in trouble. "What really upset the parents is that none of that [the safety equipment] was required," said Dzugan.

Following the death of their son, Peggy and Robert Barry spearheaded extensive lobbying efforts that led to the passage of the Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Act in 1988. Although the regulations from this act went into effect in 1991, commercial fishing remains a dangerous and too often deadly endeavor.

According to NIOSH Director Dr. J. Donald Millar, during the past two years at least 70 workers in the Alaska commercial fishing industry have died on the job, mostly by drowning. "Commercial fishing in Alaska is nearly 30 times more hazardous than the average job in the United States. It's one of the most hazardous things you can do for a living," said Millar.

An article in this week's edition of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* presents the most comprehensive study to date on commercial fishing fatalities in Alaska. NIOSH hopes that by presenting these grim statistics and recounting recent tragedies at sea, future fishing fatalities will be prevented.

To arrange interviews with Peggy Barry, contact Terry Hammond, Public Affairs Specialist, NIOSH, at (404) 639-3902. We urgently request your assistance in alerting those at risk of the hazards associated with commercial fishing and of the methods for prevention.

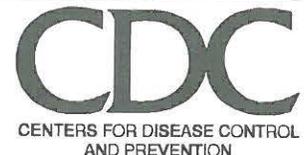


U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health



How Serious is the Risk?

Alaska has an annual work-related fatality rate for all industries (34.8 worker deaths per 100,000 workers) that is nearly five times greater than that of the entire United States (7.0 worker deaths per 100,000 workers). In response to the extraordinary rate of work-related death in this state, NIOSH established a field office in Anchorage, Alaska, two years ago. Since that time, NIOSH researchers have investigated 166 work-related deaths in Alaska. Of those deaths, 42.2% took place in the commercial fishing industry, making this one of the most hazardous occupations in the nation. The occupational fatality rate for this industry during the two years examined was 200 worker deaths per 100,000 workers.

Who is at Risk?

Research indicates that the fishers at greatest risk for death are those who operate aboard unstable vessels and those who have insufficient training in shipboard safety, especially regarding cold water survival techniques and the use of lifesaving equipment. NIOSH reports that prolonged work hours, adverse weather, and other environmental conditions in Alaska are important factors contributing to the hazardous nature of fishing.

What Safety Precautions are Needed?

Several factors can increase fishers' chances of survival on the open sea. By focusing on preventing workers from falling overboard and boats from capsizing and sinking, fewer workers will end up in need of rescue. During the last decade there has been much progress in the development of marine safety equipment and training in the commercial fishing industry. To prevent future tragedies, fishers and employers must work together to ensure that the following safety precautions are taken:

- Train all crew members in the use of safety equipment (for example, survival suits and EPIRBs) and survival techniques.
- Know where safety equipment is located and be sure that it is in proper working order.
- Conduct safety drills.
- Ensure vessel stability and proper maintenance.
- Utilize personal flotation devices (PFD).

NIOSH is in the process of developing recommendations for preventing fishers from falling overboard and drowning. These recommendations will be distributed to the industry when available.

For a list of qualified organizations that can provide proper training to employers and workers in the commercial fishing industry, call: 1-800-35-NIOSH

Preventable Alaskan Fishing Fatalities

On January 4, 1992, the Coast Guard received a signal from the EPIRB registered to the *St. George*. After searching 3,800 square miles of sea, the Coast Guard concluded that the 94-foot crab vessel, which was fully equipped with safety gear, had sunk and all six crew members had drowned.

On January 22, 1992, a 23-year-old fisherman drowned in the Bering Sea. The man was straddling a crab pot line while working on the deck of the *Magnum*. The line became taut, and the victim was hurled overboard. He was not wearing a PFD.

On February 3, 1992, a 30-year-old fisherman died while working aboard the crabber, *Sea Venture I*. When the vessel listed and began taking on water, all three crew members abandoned ship. According to the two survivors, the deceased was last seen on deck clutching his survival suit.

On August 31, 1992, a 16-year-old commercial fisherman drowned after the bowpicker he was working on capsized. The boat had experienced steering failure and was being towed at the time of the tragedy. Because the equipment to which the tow lines are normally attached had not been maintained, the line had been attached to an improper location, causing the boat to capsize. The victim was trapped inside the boat and unable to escape before succumbing to hypothermia and drowning.

As of March 10, 1993, the Coast Guard lists the *Lady of Good Voyage* and her four crew members as missing. The ship disappeared in calm seas and mild winds. All that has turned up from the 9,100 square mile search are an EPIRB, a life ring, and a life raft.

Successful Rescue

On September 22, 1992, the *Majestic*, a 70-foot vessel with a crew of five, sank in the Bering Sea. The five crewmen donned their survival suits, deployed the life raft and EPIRB, and sent a "Mayday" just as they had practiced in safety drills many times before. The entire crew, after spending several hours trying to stay afloat and warm, was rescued by the Coast Guard.