

Safety and health alert

10/06 Persons going overboard on a commercial fishing vessels

Incident

In July and August 2006 there were two instances of persons on commercial fishing prawn trawlers going overboard during and after fishing operations, resulting in fatalities. In the first case, a sharefisher was attempting to grab a lazy line winch rope when the person fell overboard in the early hours of the morning. In the second case the net retrieval work was complete for the night and the vessel was proceeding to the anchorage point during daylight hours when the sharefisher went overboard unbeknown to others on board the vessel. The alarm was raised when crew members could not find the sharefisher on setting the anchor. Extensive air and sea searches commenced in both cases, however neither sharefisher was recovered.

Commercial fishing is a high risk occupation. Studies by the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC, 1999) reveal that historically the fishing industry in Australia has one of the highest incidence rates of fatal injury, with this rate being sixteen times greater than the average for all industries. Since the collection of fatality statistics in 1988 in Western Australia by WorkSafe, there have been 44 deaths in the commercial fishing industry. 26 of the deceased went overboard from commercial fishing vessels and drowned. The causes for crew and skippers going overboard were entanglement in ropes, lines and gear, cyclones/stormy weather, large swell and also unseen disappearances from vessels at sea.

Recommendations

1. Conduct an assessment of the risk of persons going overboard and implement control measures to reduce the risk. The risk assessment should include the swimming ability of crew members.
2. Provide substantial training to inexperienced and new crew members.
3. Ensure safety inductions cover persons overboard.
4. Provide supervision comparative to the new crew member's skills and experience.
5. Develop and implement vessel emergency procedures for persons overboard.
6. Ensure a system is in place to quickly retrieve persons from the water once they are found.
7. Conduct and document person overboard drills.
8. Provide sea survival training to all crew.
9. Develop safe work procedures for fishing activities.
10. Ensure boots worn by crew members are of a fit big enough to enable the boots to be removed while in water.
11. Ensure decks have slip-resistant surfaces.
12. Implement systems and procedures when operating in rough or choppy seas.



13. Provide auto inflating or rip cord inflation personal flotation devices for all crew while on deck and ensure they are fitted with reflective tape, a manual inflation device, whistle and light.
14. Implement systems of work to reduce the risk of fatigue.
15. Ensure all platforms have guardrails, and raise the height of gunwales and guardrails on vessels to a minimum of 1000mm by a design that does not compromise the vessel's seaworthiness.
16. Relocate vertical ladders from the sides of vessel superstructures to prevent persons falling over the sides of the vessel when accessing ladders.
17. Implement systems, such as the MOBi-lert system or similar, to ensure that persons who go overboard do not go undetected and only remain in the water for a short period of time.
18. Ensure that search lights are available for use, and maintained in working order.
19. Ensure all crew know the location of safety equipment on board and that it is in good working condition.

Further information

Further information can be obtained from the Department for Planning and Infrastructure – Marine Safety Division on www.dpi.wa.gov.au, and WorkSafe's internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email safety@docep.wa.gov.au

Additional information can be found on the following websites:

Australian Safety and Compensation Council

<http://www.ascc.gov.au>

Marine Safety Victoria

<http://www.marinesafety.vic.gov.au>