

Safety and health alert

42/99 Crayboat deckhand injured in pot setting accident

Incident

A 24-year-old deckhand died from neck and brain injuries following a cray fishing accident 20 km offshore from Geraldton. The deckhand was setting craypots when he became entangled in the pot rope and was dragged overboard. He was winched from the water unconscious with the rope tangled around his neck. He was resuscitated but died two days later in hospital.

Factors

- The deceased deckhand threw the rope upwards and over the top of the craypot, instead of directly into the water from the side of the crayboat.
- The rope was thrown into the wind, which was between 15 and 25 knots, and strong enough to blow the rope back towards the deckhand.
- The same deckhand released the craypot in response to the sound of the hooter, at the same time as the rope blew back around his body.
- The mass (around 40 kg) and downward movement of the pot was sufficient to pull the deckhand overboard.

Recommendations

- The skipper should ensure that the crew are prepared and in position before giving a signal to set the pot, particularly in heavy conditions.
- Deckhands should not throw rope over the top of the craypot before sliding it into the water. The rope should be thrown directly into the water on either side of the pot.
- The deckhand throwing the main length of rope should stand next to the side of the crayboat rather than further inboard. Increasing the distance that a rope travels in the air before reaching the water increases the risk of entanglement.
- If there are two deckhands setting craypots, the deckhand with the main length of rope should stand aft of the other deckhand holding the craypot (see photograph). In this position there is less risk of entanglement with the rope as it is thrown overboard, because the boat is travelling away from where the rope is thrown.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au.

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