

# Safety and health alert

## 07/00 use of electrical tools on board fishing vessels

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### Incident

A deckhand died on a fishing vessel in March 2000. The deckhand was using a 240-volt portable angle grinder to modify a steel stabiliser board on the rear deck of a prawn trawler.

The angle grinder was connected to the 240-volt AC electricity supply via an extension lead to a socket outlet in the vessel's galley. The portable angle grinder was not protected with a residual current device.

A large wave forced water through the scuppers (self drainers) and flooded the deck where the deckhand was working. It appears that the portable angle grinder and its plug became wet and the deckhand received a fatal electric shock.

### Factors

1. No risk assessment was carried out when the angle grinder was introduced on the fishing vessel.
2. The electrical equipment was not suitable for use in a marine environment.
3. The angle grinder and its supply cord were not protected against an earth leakage current fault.
4. The extension lead was lying on the vessel's deck and exposed to salt water.

### Recommendations

1. Carry out a risk assessment when new work equipment is introduced. A risk assessment should identify:
  - That the equipment is designed to be used in the intended work environment
  - Possible safety and health hazards associated with the equipment.
  - The significance of the risks.
  - What is to be done to control the risks.
2. Portable electrical equipment must either be specifically designed for use in a marine environment or used in locations where they are not exposed to contact with water. Portable hand tools or tools operated by compressed air supply offer safer alternatives.
3. Extension leads must be kept away from water.
4. A residual current device must protect all circuits used to supply portable electrical equipment.



## Further Information

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

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