



M.O.S.T.

McMillan Offshore Survival Training

148 Waterville Road
Belfast ME 04195
207-338-1603

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From the desk of John McMillan

To Our Friends:

FISHING VESSEL SAFETY TRAINING - WHY NOW?

Commercial fishing continues to rank at or near the top of most hazardous occupations in the United States. Safety training regulations in the United States have been slow to come but there is a change beginning to occur within the US fishing industry.

The sinking of the Northern Edges in December 2004 developed what I believe the catalysis for on-board emergency training. However, in 1985 a fishing vessel off the coast of Alaska claimed the lives of 5 fishermen. Due to the love of a mother for her son, she began the process of lobbying Congress to pass a law for fishermen to have lifesaving equipment on board and to know how to properly use it. In 1988, President Reagan signed the Commercial Fishing Industry Vessel Safety Act. These regulations apply to all US uninspected commercial fishing vessels, whether documented or state registered.

Compliance with specific regulations, were based upon:

- Type and length of vessel
- Area of operation (How far out you fish)
- Number of people on board
- Whether the vessel is documented or state registered
- The date the vessel was constructed or converted

In 1991, the ruling required a “certified” drill conductor to conduct monthly drills to the crew. These drills consisted of Abandon Ship, Fire Fighting, Flooding and Man Overboard. Whoever was going to conduct these drills was required to take a USCG Approved Drill Conductor course. In the beginning, this course was set up for 5 days. 2 days were for firefighting, 1 day for Sea Survival techniques, 1 day for First Aid/CPR and 1 day set up as a Train the Trainer where trainees would practicing skills

acquired from the previous days. The 5 day concept did not work. After a few changes within the course outline 1 and 2 day courses were getting approval from the Coast Guard. The concept I believe is it is better to have a foundation to build upon that nothing at all.

So, with all this in place, fishermen still were not embracing the course probably due to limited course offerings and lack of enforcement. If you asked a fishermen, “Could you survive an emergency at sea without training” most would respond YES relying on common sense, years of at sea experience and physical strength. So they were not seeking out the training.

With the sinking of the Northern Edge, the sole survivor credited the training he had received in Portugal for saving his life. This caught the eye of politicians who questioned the USCG on what was being done for US fishermen. This is what brought to the forefront the “Drill Conductor Certification”. It is sad that if 1 or 2 fishermen die, it is considered part of the job. But when 5 die, it makes an impression that more is needed than common sense, experience and physical strength. Fishermen are common people. If a Clint Eastwood or Hillary Clinton was to die in a recreational boating accident, all boat owners would be taking a safety class before the next boating season.

With the recent sinking’s of the Lady of Grace and Lady Luck more interest is focused on safety at sea and what can be done to reduce accidents/fatalities. In my opinion, safety is an attitude and even though a fisherman is “certified” after taking an emergency preparedness class, he must keep constant attention to issues like icing, stability, crew fatigue and other signs that have been documented to create accidents. Every person on board should be trained to think safety and recognize potential threats and take necessary steps to prevent an emergency.

The State Maine has recently passed a law impacting the Lobster Apprentice Program, Student Lobster License Holders and Individuals on Zone waiting list to take a USCG Approved Drill Conductor course prior to receiving their license. This is a bold step that will provide the state with a group of fishermen that will have the knowledge and skills to instruct their crewmembers on how to properly respond to emergencies at sea. Many of the trainees will be less than 18 years of age which is a good start in developing a “safety culture” in an industry that has proven to take lives. Safety is truly becoming a “priority” in the commercial fishing industry. It’s about time!

John McMillan, President
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