



16600
August 8, 2005

COTP ADVISORY – RECENT COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL CASUALTIES

My office has recently noted a high incidence of commercial fishing vessel accidents that could have been prevented had crew been alert and observed navigational rules. Recent examples of avoidable human error include:

- **FATIGUE:** A gillnetter and a tender ran aground when their operators fell asleep at the helm.
- **LACK OF COMMUNICATION:** Two tenders collided in a meeting situation when their helmsmen, despite having a full range of sophisticated navigational equipment available to them, both made poor navigational decisions; not the least of which was a failure to hail one another via VHF radio when in doubt of their relative positions and intentions.
- **INATTENTION:** Two vessels, a gillnetter and a seiner, ran aground when their operators' attention was focused elsewhere (on a possible anchorage and on a refrigeration problem, respectively). The seiner subsequently sank and discharged oil into Icy Strait.

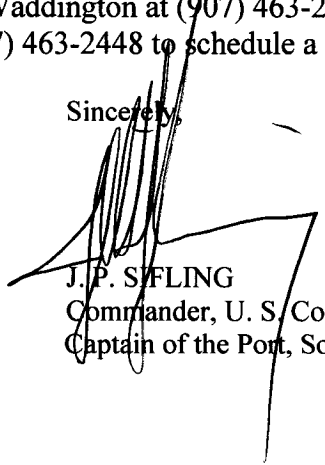
In 2004, approximately 60% of fishing vessel casualties in Southeast Alaska could have been avoided had proper situational awareness been maintained. Thus far in 2005, this percentage is even higher. In addition to putting lives and livelihoods at risk, commercial fishing vessel casualties also accounted for half of the oil discharged in Southeast Alaska's waters last year.

Two key factors in many fishing vessel casualties include fatigue and inadequate knowledge of navigation rules. Captains are ultimately responsible for the safe operation of their vessels. This includes ensuring that crewmembers receive adequate rest and possess the requisite knowledge to navigate safely. The Coast Guard urges commercial fishing vessel operators to examine their fishing practices and take stock of the dangerous conditions that can result from long work schedules and inadequate rest. As a protector of life at sea and the marine environment, the Coast Guard may impose civil penalties on operators who put their vessels and crews at risk, or who discharge oil into Alaskan waters as the result of accidents.

As an extra precaution against preventable casualties, operators may take advantage of the Coast Guard's fishing vessel exam program. If you own or operate a fishing vessel in Southeast Alaska, you may schedule a free dockside exam. An examiner will visit your vessel, checking for safety and regulatory compliance. No fines or penalties will be assessed during this exam. Examiners will gladly take the time to answer any questions about safety equipment or practices. Additional information is available on the internet at <http://www.uscg.mil/d17/m/cfvs.shtml>.

Feel free to contact Lieutenant Randy Waddington at (907) 463-2444 if you have any questions about casualties or Larry Snyder at (907) 463-2448 to schedule a fishing vessel exam.

Sincerely,


J. P. STFLING
Commander, U. S. Coast Guard
Captain of the Port, Southeast Alaska