Commercial Fishing – Fact Sheet



WHAT SHOULD I KNOW BEFORE READING ABOUT THIS OCCUPATION?

This profile summarizes the common issues and duties for commercial fishing operations. It is impossible to predict all of the possible hazards a commercial fishing person may encounter. The demands can be sporadic and unpredictable with intermittent periods of intense physical and psychological stress. This summary focuses on the major job duties that most commercial fishing persons (those fishing primarily from a vessel on water) would have in common.

This document is not specific to enforcement/rescue, or diving operations. These occupations require specific training and qualifications beyond the general information provided here.

Briefly, what does a commercial fishing person do?

Main duties of a commercial fishing person include:

- Use instruments and navigation aids.
- Maintain vessel and equipment.
- Housekeeping.
- Work outdoors in extreme environments.
- Lift, push, pull the catch, cargo, and objects.
- Work in the cold (e.g., weather, freezers, cold water).
- Work with machinery, including winches and other rotating equipment.
- Perform water rescue, as necessary.

What are some health and safety hazards associated with commercial fishing?

Commercial fishing is done in an extreme environment, and uses various types of equipment. Because the environment can change quickly, it is important to remain alert to any changes. Hazards include (but are not limited to):

- Working on or near water, including cold-water shock and immersion
- Drowning
- Injuries from fish spine/bones or bacteria
- Working outdoors:
    - Weather (including lightning)
    - Cold Environments – General, Working in the Cold, Health effects and First Aid, Temperature Conditions – Cold

    - Hot Environments – Health effects and First Aid, Control Measures, Temperature Conditions – Hot
    - Humidex Rating and Work
    - Ultraviolent radiation (sunlight)
    - Working Safely around Stinging Insects
    - Diseases transmitted by insect bites, including Lyme Disease and West Nile Virus
- Working at heights, including the use of body belts, harnesses and lanyards
- Working near machinery, including using safeguards
- Working with hand tools and powered hand tools
- Chemical hazards, including following WHMIS – the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System
- Noise
- Slips, trips, falls
- Working on ladders
- Work related musculoskeletal disorders
- Lifting and materials handling
- Pulling and pushing
- Damage to the boat, including fire collision, grounding, capsizing,
- Fatigue from long hours of work or shiftwork
- Food and kitchen hygiene
- Cooking safely
- Working with sharp blades or edges
- Working alone

What emergency response procedures should be in place?

All crew members show know how respond to a person overboard, fire on board, and flooding of the boat. Crew must also know how to abandon ship, and to call for help using any radios, phones, flares, or distress flag. All crew should also know the location and use of safety equipment, engine room components and controls, deck equipment and rigging, navigation equipment and electronic devices, safe use of fishing equipment, how to anchor the boat, and escape routes specific to that boat. Everyone on board the vessel should know where this equipment is stored, and how to use it. Learn exactly what specific requirements and regulations apply to your vessel.

Drills should be done at the beginning of the season, and anytime when new crew is on board. Drills can include how to abandon ship, deal with a situation (flood, fire, collision, etc.), how to put on the immersion suit, and how to rescue a person who fell overboard. Use of life jackets or personal flotation devices (PFDs) is required by law. Immersion suits are also recommended when working over cold water.

What are some general steps a commercial fishing operation should do?

- Before leaving port, inspect and test equipment including the hull of the boat, watertight doors and hatches, all alarm systems, and rescue equipment. Keep doors and hatches closed to avoid flooding.
- Keep all machinery in good repair, and make sure all guards and emergency stop devices are installed and working correctly. Regularly inspect all rescue equipment and report any damage to the vessel master. Do not wear loose-fitting clothing or dangling jewellery or rings as they may get caught in nets, lines, or machinery. Tie back long hair.

- When boarding or leaving the vessel, use the gangway or ladder. Don’t jump.
- Decks should have non-slip surfaces (except where a smooth surface is required to handle fish). Keep decks clear and uncluttered.
- Stow all ropes in coils. Tie down or stow loose equipment. Clean up spills and manage any water or ice issues to avoid slips and falls.
- Vessels with galleys and crew quarters will need to manage food and kitchen cleanliness to prevent food borne diseases, as well as knowing how to work safely with sharp blades or knives. In addition, cooking must be managed in a small space that moves with the motion of the vessel. Store utensils in racks and drawers, and use a guardrail on the stove to help stop pots and pans from moving.
- Make sure that cabins and living quarters are well ventilated, and use alarms to alert the crew (e.g., carbon monoxide detectors).
- Never stand in or around loose rope or wire to avoid getting entangled, especially when wires, ropes or nets are moving.
- Wear heavy gloves or mitts when handling wire rope and never guide wire with your hands or feet.
- Do not stand under a load or in areas where overhead equipment may swing.

What should be done for fall protection when working at heights?

Falling overboard is a serious hazard. In addition, there are times when a person has to work suspended above the deck (aloft). When working on deck or aloft take the following precautions:

- Use a lifeline when working aloft or when on deck during adverse weather conditions.
- Use a lifeline and safety belt when trap fishing.
- Wear fall protection if a person could fall about 3 metres (10 feet). Check with your jurisdiction for exact requirements.
- Make sure that no other gear you may be wearing will interfere with the self-inflating mechanism of the PFD.
- Make sure that the radar is turned off before you go aloft to avoid radiation exposure and to prevent injury from a rotating scanner. Put a “Do Not Operate Radar – Persons Working Aloft” sign on the radar control panel to alert others that someone is working aloft.
- Attach safety lanyards to all tools and parts (e.g., secure your hammer to your wrist) to prevent items from dropping and injuring those below. Raise or lower your tools by using rigging and placing the tools in a safe container.
- Use a bosun’s chair or similar device (a device with a rigid seat attached to a rope used to suspend a person to perform work) with appropriate safety harness and fall arresting gear.

What are some general safe work practices to know?

All workers should:

- Follow safe work procedures.
- Follow emergency and first aid procedures.
- Know when and how to use personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Know how to report a hazard.
- Know about WHMIS and Safety Data Sheets (SDSs).
- Follow good housekeeping procedures.

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