

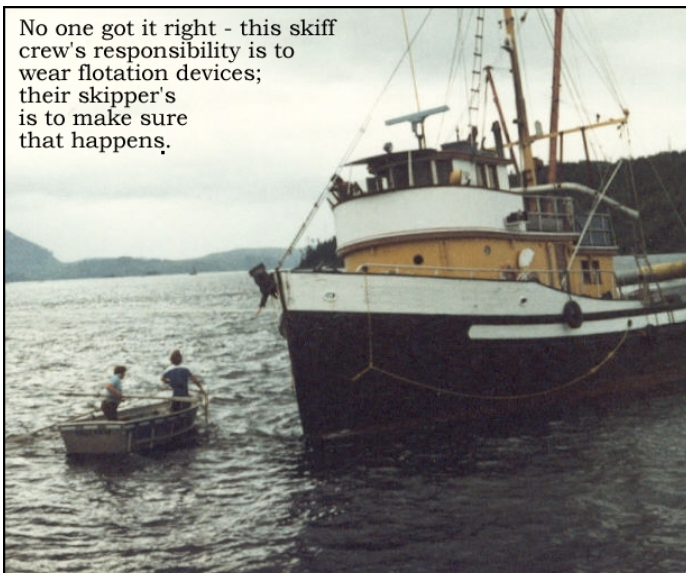
Coming OUT Is a Lot Slower Than Going IN



BY
HARVEY
LINTON
WorkSafeBC Industry and
Labour Services Manager,
General Industries

Years ago in the Juan de Fuca Strait, we were waiting for a seiner to close up so we could set, when we got a call saying that its power skiff was in trouble. We raced to that end of their net and found one skiff man yanking on a line caught in the wheel. The other man was flopping in the water, gasping for breath. He couldn't swim, and his life jacket was in the skiff. We rescued him, and then helped close up their net.

You don't need to be a non-swimmer to become a drowning statistic. Drowning is the leading cause of death for BC's commercial fishermen, and that terrible end can be reached in many ways — your vessel capsizes, sinks or grounds or you fall, have to jump or are dragged or knocked overboard.



No one got it right - this skiff crew's responsibility is to wear flotation devices; their skipper's is to make sure that happens.

Your immediate life-or-death concern, once you're in the water, is staying afloat. That's why Transport Canada requires flotation gear such as life jackets, rafts and personal flotation devices

(PFDs). A big safety issue is getting fishermen to wear flotation, even in a skiff. Many worry about life jackets snagging, or simply don't want to compromise the mobility needed for the hard work of fishing.

Fortunately, those concerns aren't as real as they once were. You can choose a PFD to meet your specific needs and the weather and sea conditions you expect. You can wear inflatable, lightweight and slim-line PFDs while working. They come in a variety of shapes and materials, and some limit the loss of body heat in cold water. It's worth doing a little research before buying. Consider material with hypothermic protection and a bright colour that's easy to spot, as well as a water-activated signal light. Most important is buoyancy, with 35 pounds when inflated considered good.

Once you have a new PFD, try it at a pool or the beach before you go fishing, to get a sense of how it inflates and that it will keep you afloat. After you use it, clean it with mild soap and running water, and let it air dry away from direct sun or heat sources. You should also check PFDs periodically to ensure they have correct and sufficient buoyancy.

When I was a commercial fisherman, I told myself repeatedly that some other boats might get into trouble, but never the one I was on. I say "repeatedly" because I still experienced two groundings and a near-capsizing. The facts are that any vessel can get into trouble and any fisherman can end up in the water. The other hard reality is that you always come out of the water a lot slower than you go in.

You might remember a herring trawler that capsized in the Gulf Islands several years ago. The only survivor wore a PFD.

Transport-Canada-approved products are listed at www.tc.gc.ca/MarineSafety/APCI-ICPA/. For information from Underwriters' Laboratories of Canada, enter "flotation devices" in the search engine at www.ulc.ca.

Email comments to Ellen.Hanson@worksafebc.com, or phone her at 604-233-4008 in the Lower Mainland, toll-free elsewhere in BC to 1-888-621-7233.



WORKING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE