

What's Worse Than Not Helping an Injured Shipmate?

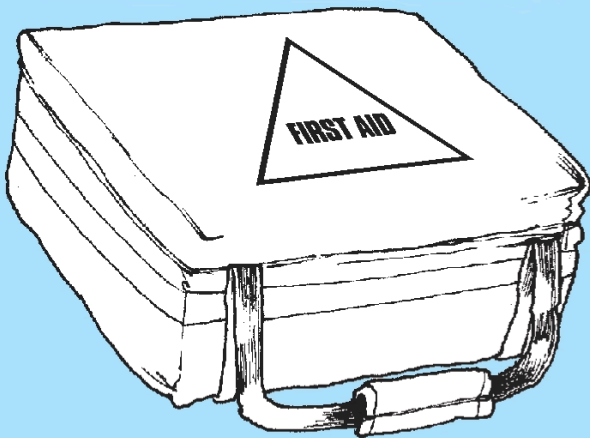


BY
HARVEY
LINTON
for WorkSafeBC

In commercial fishing, working alone or with shipmates, you earn a living in a hazardous environment that can be harsh and unforgiving. Preventing accidents and injuries is always the best option at sea, but the worst can happen even on well-managed boats with highly-skilled crews.

I recall some narrow escapes from my time in the industry. Some involved little more than minor cuts; others were nasty injuries. Naturally, things like these happen in all occupations, but fishing is different from most. You can't just call 9-1-1 if a crewmember is seriously injured. On a fishing vessel, knowing first aid and what to do when someone's hurt can be a matter of life or death.

You can't call 9-1-1 at sea, so be sure you have the right first aid tools and that everyone on board knows how to use them.



What could be worse than the lasting memory of being unable to help a seriously-injured shipmate or an injured fisherman on another boat — because you lack the necessary knowledge or first aid supplies?

Owner-operators and crewmembers should be ready to deal with a smorgasbord of injury situations. A partial list might include:

- a hook in the eye or another body part, or cuts from gaffs or knives;
- being struck by a falling block or a line that parted or whipped out of a block;

- getting caught in a winch, a drum, sheave, gears, shaft or roller;
- being crushed by a falling power block or an improperly-secured skiff;
- slipping and falling on deck, from a ladder or when getting on or off the boat (or even falling from a bunk when the boat heaves); or
- hypothermia threatening someone who was immersed in cold water.

When assisting an injured person, always protect yourself because it only makes things worse if you're hurt, too. It's imperative that you first survey the situation to avoid hazards that could injure you. When that's done, start by immediately seeing to the victim's vital needs, in this order:

1. clear the airway if blocked and restore breathing;
2. check circulation and, if necessary, initiate chest compressions;
3. control heavy bleeding;
4. treat shock; and
5. make the immediate area safe.

After that, it's time to determine the extent of the injuries (except, of course, in extreme situations like the vessel sinking).

Generally, injured persons shouldn't be moved until the nature of their injuries has been determined. Moving someone with neck or back injuries could lead to complications and further injuries.

Get qualified help for serious injuries that you can't treat effectively, whether you're at sea or near medical facilities. State the nature of injuries and your location and any significant weather conditions. It's possible that a health professional on a radiophone could talk you through steps to help the victim until help arrives.

WorkSafeBC requires all injuries to be recorded, preferably in the vessel's logbook, and first aid records kept for 10 years.

For more on first aid requirements, including types of kits and training requirements, check Pages 44-47 of the manual *Gearing Up for Safety*. At www.worksafebc.com, click on "Publications." On the next page, click the link under "Publications index." Then click on "G" and scroll down.

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



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