

How You Survive a WORST-CASE Scenario



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for WorkSafeBC

Fire at sea, capsizing, running aground, collision, explosion, someone overboard — the odds of surviving worst-case scenarios go up dramatically for experienced, well-trained crews on good boats. It also helps if you've worked together for longer stretches, but that's not likely in some fisheries. But no matter what your fishery or your vessel's size, you can do a lot to improve your odds of a good ending if the worst happens.

All it takes is thinking ahead, anticipating the possibilities and writing out exactly how the skipper and crew should deal with emergencies. This plan should involve orientation for new crewmembers, as well as training and periodic emergency drills for all. That may seem pretty bureaucratic, but studies of actual vessel casualties show that training and drills go a long way to limiting injuries and raising survival rates.



Your odds of surviving a worst-case scenario like this are much better if your vessel runs emergency drills

Documentation telling crewmembers what's expected of them in emergencies is a good insurance policy. But stuffed in a drawer and seldom or never used, it's not worth the paper it's written on. Periodic hands-on practice with emergency gear, both

night and day, can improve the retention rate of what needs to be done to as much as 90%. Nothing works as well. This is far more effective than simply reading instructions or seeing a show-and-tell session. Your drills should fit your vessel, but here are some necessary basics:

- Activating the general alarm;
- abandoning the vessel;
- fighting fires in different locations onboard the vessel;
- recovering a person from the water;
- minimizing the effects of unintentional flooding;
- launching the life raft or survival craft;
- donning immersion suits and appropriate lifejackets or personal flotation devices;
- for those who have them, donning firefighting outfits and self-contained breathing apparatus; and
- making simulated voice radio distress calls, and using visual distress signals.

Drills build teamwork and let you develop confidence in those you must count on in an emergency. After a drill, it's important to give each crewmember a chance to talk about what was learned and how it might be done better.

In my younger, greener days, I counted on "the other guy" doing what was necessary in an emergency. It's natural to expect someone who's fished a few seasons will know what to do, and easy to find yourself in trouble as a result. Some know, but many don't. In your case, if the skipper and engineer were lost, would you know the drill? Would your shipmates? Answer "no" to either question, and it's definitely time to talk to other crewmembers about getting prepared with life-saving drills. Do it now, before one of those worst-case scenarios catches your boat.

The boats that I fished on never conducted drills. But if we had, more iffy situations would have gone smoother for me. Many of us were lucky, some not so lucky.

It's a bad gamble to just hope your shipmates know what to do when things get rough. You're all better off having everyone onboard well-prepared. The stakes are too high for anything else.

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