

# It Can REALLY Hurt... OR WORSE, When Fisherman Get Caught



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Commercial fishing is a high-risk industry, and a significant reason is the number of crewmembers who get caught in lines and equipment like winches, drums, rollers, sheaves and shafts and are too often seriously injured or killed.

No gear type or fishery is immune from incidents like these:

- A deckhand on a dragger pulled into the winch when his oilskin jacket got caught in the cable;
- Gillnetter or seiner crewmembers wrapped around drums or caught in nets and dragged overboard;
- On a crab boat, a crewmember's hand was pulled through the pot hauler because it caught his sleeve;
- On a seiner, an engineer's foot crushed by the spooling gear when caught between the roller and the bulwark.



It obviously doesn't help that you often work in wet, slippery conditions on rolling, heaving and sometimes listing boats, and that it can be difficult for you to guard machinery and equipment as shore-based operations do. But the fishing industry has been innovative with hold-to-run devices, trip-wire controls and other mechanical stopping devices.

You'd think these would be common knowledge, but that's not the case. Asked if his pot hauler had a hold-to-run control, one relatively-new crab boat owner-operator said, "What's that?" Previously relying on simply telling crewmembers to watch out for themselves, he now agrees the control is a good idea.

Here are a few more ideas on dealing with emergencies caused when moving lines and equipment snag and injure crewmembers:

- For situations like the spooling gear example above, tabs welded to the deck to keep the roller from spooling right to the bulwark;
- Emergency stops for winches that disengage the equipment when a crewmember just hits the switch;
- Trip wires that crewmembers in trouble can pull or bump to stop equipment that's endangering them.

Naturally, the best engineered systems can never entirely replace good, safe work practices. Everyone involved in fishing operations has a personal responsibility for preventing injuries and fatalities caused by moving lines and equipment.

Crewmembers must wear gloves and clothing that won't snag and keep fingers and hands clear of moving gear whenever possible. Long hair should be kept under hats or other coverings. Skippers and owners should run general safety crew talks when a season opens and periodic follow-ups on specific topics as it continues, especially when new or young crewmembers are aboard.

None of that is really expensive, but it's not free either. Sometimes, engineering solutions like trip wires or emergency stops are best to reduce risk. In other cases, individual crewmembers are responsible for buying and wearing appropriate clothing or other gear. The owner or skipper should always:

- Compare the relatively minor savings of not taking preventive action to losing several days' productive fishing because of a serious accident at sea;
- Consider how you will explain to the relatives of an injured or dead crewmember why you didn't invest in controls that are more effective or spend time training their loved one.

Simply telling crewmembers to be careful may be enough at times, but that's clearly not so in many cases. ■

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July 2008 FISHERMAN LIFE