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Inter-Agency Marine Action Group

A West Coast Initiative To Enhance And Promote Safety Awareness In The Marine Community.

AGENCIES INVOLVED

- TSB
- TC
- WCB
- DFO
- BC Seafood Alliance
- Maritime Education Association
- Quinte Marine
- BC Fish Harvesters
- UFAWU-CAW
- Canfisco
- Gulf Of Georgia Cannery
- Mutual Marine Insurance

In the early morning hours of 26 February 2004, the fishing trawler *Hope Bay* capsized suddenly in Queen Charlotte Sound north of Cape Scott en route to Port Hardy, B.C. The four persons onboard jumped into the sea moments before the vessel capsized completely. One person survived while three perished. The survivor and two of the deceased were wearing "Universal size" immersion suits approved by Transport Canada (TC) while the fourth person was wearing a personal flotation device (PFD). The Transportation Safety Board (TSB) is investigating this occurrence.

To date, information gathered has revealed that the effectiveness of an immersion suit in preserving life during an abandonment depends in large measure upon the wearer remaining dry. It was also determined that "Universal size" may not properly fit everyone within the specified height and weight range. It is, therefore, important that mariners test the suit and ensure the following three conditions are met:

every suit fits its wearer well and provides a watertight seal at the neck, face and wrists (all zippers and closures are to be positioned as designed);

immersion suit donning drills are regularly performed by fishing vessel personnel as an effective means of preparing for an abandonment situation;

immersion suits are well maintained to ensure that all material, seals and zippers are kept in good watertight condition.

It should be noted that Transport Canada publication TP13822E¹, (01/2003), 'Survival in Cold Waters', states that as little as 500 ml of water ingress into an immersion suit can reduce its insular value by 30%, and drastically reduce a user's survival time in cold water. If any of the preceding conditions are not met, a mariner in an emergency situation would face significant risks with few or no means of avoiding them.

In summary, the value of immersion suits in helping to preserve life in emergency abandonment situations depends in large measure upon their being of proper fit in order to prevent an ingress of water, being maintained in good watertight condition, and being worn in regular drills to ensure donning proficiency.

On completion of drills where the suit has been immersed in water it is important that the suit be fresh water rinsed, dried and stowed, with the zipper almost fully open and lubricated.