

New York Commercial Fishing Fleet Practices Safety-At-Sea

Commercial fishing is listed as one of the most dangerous occupations* and each year thousands of dollars are spent responding to commercial fishing vessels that are in distress while at sea. In the past, NOAA and the U.S. Coast Guard expressed concern about the safety record for the commercial fishing fleet in the Northeast. In New York, there has been no formal Safety-At-Sea training in more than 10 years.

New York Sea Grant, with financial support from the New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health (NYCAMH) and other partners, including the U.S. Coast Guard, Long Island Occupational and Environmental Health Center (LIOEHC), and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County Marine Program, hosted a Safety-At-Sea workshop at Inlet Seafood Packing House, Montauk, NY. This training featured instructors certified by the Alaska Marine Safety Education Association.

Captains and crew members who attended this one-day training learned about cold water survival strategies, practiced safety drills,



donned immersion suits, deployed distress signals and a full size inflatable life craft, extinguished mock engine room fires, and learned about other damage control techniques.



“Without a doubt, I’d rather learn here on the dock than offshore when it’s 5 degrees in February.” — John Scheu of the Kimberly fishing vessel crew. Photo: Barbara Branca, NYSG

Fishermen obtained a formal inspection of their safety equipment.

More than 60 commercial fishermen and fisheries biologists benefited from this training:

- 14 percent of the participants had never participated in formal Safety-At-Sea drills.
- Approximately 21 percent of the safety equipment did not meet the US Coast Guards standards and owners were encouraged to replace them.
- 15 commercial fishermen received new state-of-the-art personal flotation devices (PFDs). One fisherman received a new immersion suit. LIOHEC donated the safety equipment.

This type of safety training is invaluable to commercial fishermen who risk their lives daily to work the waters of New York.

* U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor (2010)

Safety-At-Sea training participants practice emergency vessel-repair techniques. Photo: Barbara Branca, NYSG

This project meets the performance measures of Sea Grant’s Safe & Sustainable Seafood Supply focus area. New York Sea Grant Extension administration is located at 112 Rice Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853.

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