Everyday Realities for Fishermen

When I saw my colleague Pat Shepard in the water – with all but his head and flailing arms submerged while he waited for us to maneuver around and get him back on board – I felt something I had never felt before. Knowing the water was just above 40 degrees and that hypothermia can set in in minutes, my body couldn’t help but viscerally react to this sight. Thankfully, this was all planned and Pat was equipped with an immersion suit and the U.S. Coast Guard was on watch just a couple-hundred meters away. We were filming crew-overboard scenarios and drill procedures to raise awareness of the importance of conducting crew overboard drills. Normally, drills wouldn’t involve a crew member actually going overboard, instead opting for a buoy or a Crew Overboard Dummy. But for an upcoming video series that MCCF is creating – with the help and sponsorship of Center for Disease Control, National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health (NIOSH), and U.S. Coast Guard – I wanted to get imagery of a real person in the water because the reality of seeing a person who’s gone overboard creates a visceral reaction to want to help.

Of course, this is nothing new to fishermen as they think about these realities every day. NIOSH reports that 725 commercial fishermen died while fishing in the U.S. from 2000-2015; 221(30%) were a result of falls overboard. Accidents happen and are always at the worst times. With the known dangers of this emergency - hypothermia, drowning, and death - the reaction to a crew member going overboard has to be instant, especially if an entanglement is involved. There’s variability in every crew overboard scenario. Whether they are entangled or conscious, injured or able to assist, visible or out of sight. We filmed some of these variables to emphasize the need to have a plan for all types of emergencies. When accidents happen, all we can hope for is that we are best equipped and prepared to help get that person back onboard, and we believe one of the best ways to do that is to regularly conduct emergency drills.

In addition to Pat, special thanks goes to Blake Haas, Tom Duym, and the crew at the US Coast Guard Station at Southwest Harbor for assisting with this film shoot. For future updates on this project, visit us at coastalfisheries.org. Do you have a question about our fisheries? Send it to info@coastalfisheries.org or call 207.367.2708.

Prices to Harvesters
(in Stonington)
Lobsters (shedder): $4/lb.
Bait (pogies): $78/bu.
Fuel (diesel): $5.49/gal.
Disclaimer: figures collected on Dec.19, 2022

Oceanographic Buoy I-01
44°6’10”N 68°6’44”W - Frenchboro
Bottom Temperature (50 meters): 53.58°F
(avg. for this date: 53.55°F)
Source: www.neracoos.org