

Alaska hosts the Second International Fishing Industry Safety & Health Conference (IFISH II)



Sitka, the historic city of Alaska (and also its capital during Russian governance of Alaska) hosted the Second International Fishing Industry Safety & Health Conference from 22 to 24 September 2003. The Conference drew experts from around the world to discuss the latest developments in commercial fishing safety and injury prevention – including safety promotion, occupational health, injury prevention, and public safety. The National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety, USA, Alaska Marine Safety Education Association and Alaska Sea Grant College Program sponsored the Conference. The FAO, Rome supported the participation of BOBP-IGO and of some delegates from developing countries.

IFISH I, held in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, USA, in October 2000, explored strategies to prevent fishermen from being injured or killed on the job through measures such as improving vessel stability and hull integrity; making safety equipment like survival suits and life rafts more universally available; furthering education and training; implementing safer management regimes; heeding weather information; averting falls overboard; and addressing industrial safety problems that exist on board many fishing vessels.

Building on the foundation of the first Conference, IFISH II brought together experts interested in all aspects of fishing safety from around the world, in order to raise consciousness, build coalitions, disseminate information, and encourage action to prevent injury in the commercial fishing industry. It also placed special emphasis on papers and presentations describing programs, coalitions, and interventions with proven success in reducing risk to commercial fishermen. During the three-day long sessions, more than 40 fishing industry safety experts from around the world presented their research, observations and injury prevention strategies, covering the following topics:

- Industrial/ mechanical hazards on fishing vessels
- Cold hazard and injury, cold-water drowning - treatment, prevention and survival
- Community/ industry-based research and interventions
- Health promotion and interventions
- History of fishing vessel safety
- Vessel stability, hull integrity and safety equipment - success stories and/or needs

- Relationship between fishery management and safety
- Model programs for fishing injury prevention
- Safety management systems on fishing vessels
- Hazards associated with small fishing vessels
- Safety and survival education and training

The papers presented in the Conference will be shortly available in a comprehensive volume now being edited by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, USA.

BOBP-IGO and Safety at Sea

The Bay of Bengal, unlike many other seas, is rough for most parts of the year; cyclones are frequent and come without warning. The monsoon increases the perils of fishing at sea. With the resource getting scarce in coastal waters, artisanal and small-scale fishing vessels are venturing deeper into the sea, risking their lives. Fishing-related deaths are on the increase - more likely the result of economic pressures and human factors such as risk-taking, fatigue, lack of vessel maintenance, stress or simply an attitudinal problem.

Many lives that are lost at sea can be saved if simple safety and communication equipment are kept onboard. The reasons for this human tragedy are all well-known. Regulations governing boat construction, availability of onboard safety and navigation equipment and timely warnings on rough weather are either absent or not strictly enforced. Who is responsible for this? The government, the boat owners or the fishermen? All the three are equally responsible. The case of artisanal and small-scale fisheries is perhaps the most pertinent in terms of promotion of responsible fisheries operations, and the most problematic, because safety regimes are the weakest here.

The issues concerning safety at sea can be tackled, but call for firm resolve and sound long-term programmes. BOBP-IGO is committed to creating a safer working environment for artisanal and small-scale fishers, and to carrying forward the Chennai Declaration (*Bay of Bengal News*, Vol. III, Nos. 2&3, June – September 2001).

The ILO and the FAO estimate that 7 per cent of all worker fatalities worldwide occur in the fishing industry, although the industry accounts for less than 1 per cent of the worldwide workforce.