

BACKGROUND

Vessel Stability in Commercial Fishing

What are some of the safety risks associated with the commercial fishing industry in BC?

Between 1975 and 2008, 160 fishing vessels capsized with 68 lives lost.

Capsizing is a major safety risk factor for all sizes and types of fishing vessels along the coast of British Columbia. Vessel instability is the main cause of vessels foundering or capsizing often leading to crew fatalities.

In recent years, 84% of all fish harvester deaths were the result of drowning.

What factors can contribute to vessel instability?

Risk factors can be eliminated or controlled if vessel owners, masters and individual crew members know, understand and carry out their responsibilities to prevent capsizing.

Reasons for vessel instability can include:

- insufficient initial stability
- lack of operational stability, water flooding down through open doors, hatches and/or deck fittings
- raising the vessel's centre of gravity beyond a critical point
- fish holds and other tanks that are only partially filled

What occupational health and safety regulations apply to vessel stability in commercial fishing in BC?

Fishing vessel stability falls within the jurisdiction of Transport Canada under the Canada Shipping Act which currently requires formal stability assessment for specific commercial fishing vessels.

WorkSafeBC requires that:

- major modifications to a vessel are done in a manner that does not affect the stability of the vessel
- operating procedures do not affect the stability of the vessel
- fishing vessels carry up-to-date stability documentation. The *2005 Guideline on Fishing Vessel Stability* outlines the acceptable measures for compliance consistent with Transport Canada requirements

Who was consulted in the development of the WorkSafeBC guideline?

The fishing industry through the Fish Safe Advisory Committee was consulted during the guideline's development. Groups such as the BC Seafood Alliance, BC Council of Professional Fish Harvesters, Fishing Vessel Owners Association, Native Brotherhood of BC, and United Fisherman and Allied Workers' Union also had input. WorkSafeBC considers the input by the fishing industry to be a valuable component in the development of industry guidelines, policies and regulations.

What can be done to prevent injuries and fatalities?

One strategy to deal with the issue of fishing vessel stability involves the inspection of about 3,500 fishing vessels in BC and will take up to seven years to complete.

The goal is to inspect all commercial fishing vessels in the province for:

- documentation that includes up-to-date written instructions enabling skipper and crew to make accurate judgments about their vessel's stability
- demonstration of stability knowledge by vessel operators
- implementation of safe work practices and crew training involving operational stability issues

What information and resources are available?

Fish Safe BC coordinates the Fish Safe Stability Education program developed by fishermen covering topics on understanding the threats to and evaluation of vessel stability. The course is recommended to help operators meet both WorkSafeBC and Transport Canada requirements. Fish Safe stability course information details can be found at www.fishsafebc.com.

WorkSafeBC can organize presentations on vessel stability by local safety officers who work with the fishing industry and provide information on safety materials such as posters and hazard alerts as well as for the *Guideline for Fishing Vessel Stability*. Details can be found at www.worksafebc.com