Commercial fishing is one of the most dangerous occupations in the U.S. At one point, it was seven times more dangerous than the average U.S. industry and twice as dangerous as mining, the next most dangerous industry.

From 1981 through 1991, there were 1154 fatalities, an average of 105 per year. During this time, 76% of fishing fatalities resulted from water exposure.

The Commercial Fishing Industry Vessel Safety Act was passed in 1988. In 1991 the Coast Guard issued regulations addressing safety and survival equipment, training, and periodic drills among other things.

The most recent statistics show that from 1994 through 2004, there were 641 fatalities, or 58 per year. That is a 45% drop in fatalities. This suggests that the regulations requiring safety and survival equipment have had the intended effect.

From 1994 through 2004, the primary event leading to water exposure fatalities was vessel loss (328), followed by falling overboard (154). Of the 328 fatalities resulting from vessel loss, 234 occurred in cold water areas and the usage rates of survival suits/PFDs (shown below) was relatively low.

You are more than twice as likely to survive a vessel loss when lifesaving equipment is used.

Of the 34 fatalities where survival suits were used, they were damaged, did not fit, or were not completely donned. This highlights the importance of maintaining lifesaving equipment and practicing its use.

Of the 51 survivors who did not use survival suits, 17 were saved by using a life raft. EPIRBs and radios were only used in 35% of the sinkings. Many of these fatalities may have been prevented if the required emergency equipment had been used. You must commit to not only maintain, but learn how to use lifesaving and survival equipment in an emergency. When seconds count, training and hands-on drills will make the difference.

www.FishSafe.info