



## Proceedings, Second International Fishing Industry Safety and Health Conference

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION  
NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH  
*and*  
ALASKA MARINE SAFETY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION



**PROCEEDINGS OF THE SECOND  
INTERNATIONAL  
FISHING INDUSTRY SAFETY AND HEALTH  
CONFERENCE**

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
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NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND  
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**AND**

**ALASKA MARINE SAFETY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**

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# Foreword

Commercial fishermen continue to risk their lives and livelihood as they labor to bring food to tables around the world. Few occupations are as dangerous as that of a commercial fisherman's, and we at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health place the safety of these workers as a high priority. We call upon the readers of this proceedings volume to join our efforts to support safety training for commercial fishermen and the acquisition and use of safety equipment, including personal flotation devices, survival suits, and radio equipment, for all commercial fishing vessels. While we may not be able to control the harsh environment in which commercial fishing takes place, we certainly can promote safer vessels and survival training for workers in the commercial fishing industry.

John Howard, MD, MPH, JD, LLM  
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# Preface

Fatal traumatic injuries in commercial fishing have resulted in this industry being one of the most hazardous in Alaska, the United States, and many other nations. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimate that 7% of all worker fatalities worldwide occur in the fishing industry, even though this industry accounts for less than 1% of the worldwide workforce. The fatality rate for U.S. commercial fishermen was 168 per 100,000 workers per year from 1994 through 1998, 35 times the overall US occupational fatality rate (4.8 per 100,000 workers per year) (CFOI). Around the world, for example, in Australia, Denmark, Finland, Korea, and Sweden, occupational fishing fatality rates range from 16 to as much as 79 times higher than these countries' overall occupational fatality rate. The ILO has estimated that the fishing industry experiences 24,000 deaths and as many as 24 million nonfatal injuries each year worldwide.

To bring together fishermen, fishing safety proponents and professionals, government officials, equipment manufacturers, and other parties interested in fishing safety and health, the Alaska Field Station, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, organized the Fishing Industry Safety and Health (FISH) conferences. The first two (Anchorage, Alaska, in 1992, and Seattle, Washington, in 1997) were national in scope. As these were well-attended and included participants wanting to learn from other countries where fishing was of economic significance, we decided to broaden the scope of the next conference. Thus, the first International Fishing Industry Safety and Health Conference (IFISH) was held in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, in October of 2000, in collaboration with the Harvard School of Public Health. That meeting was well attended and included representatives from many nations.

In late September of 2003, working with the Alaska Marine Safety Education Association, we held IFISHIII in Sitka, Alaska, which drew 135 registrants from 18 nations. Forty speakers addressed topics ranging from deck safety needs for crabbers working in northern waters to policy changes affecting Pacific Island States. Among the presenters were seven speakers sponsored by FAO who provided overviews of commercial fishing safety programs in developing countries, including Tonga, Sri Lanka,

Pakistan, India, Senegal, and Chile. IFISH II's focus on safer working environments for commercial fishermen is part of a growing international emphasis on the need for collaboration among governments, nongovernmental entities, vessel owners and operators, and fishermen themselves to develop effective safety programs. Although fishermen from Sri Lanka sometimes face different types of problems than do fishermen from Sweden or the United States, all of them are operating offshore, usually at some distance from emergency help.

This proceedings volume includes manuscripts submitted for 28 of the 40 presentations given at the conference. The range of subjects is impressive, from risk factor analyses to intervention approaches, some rooted in practicalities and success, some more theoretical. The presentations and resulting papers represent tremendous geographic diversity as well, with papers presented and submitted by fishermen from the South Pacific all the way to the Arctic Circle. Gathering people from fishing countries spread around the globe at an event like IFISH II helps us all to identify programs, equipment, and policies that are effective in promoting fishing safety.

George A. Conway, MD, MPH  
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Anchorage, Alaska  
January 2004

# Executive Summary

This volume contains material that was presented at the Second International Fishing Industry Safety and Health Conference in Sitka, Alaska, on September 22 through September 24, 2003. IFISH II was sponsored by NIOSH's Alaska Field Station and convened with the help of the Alaska Marine Safety Education Association of Sitka. More than 125 participants attended sessions on various aspects of commercial fishing safety. Forty speakers addressed topics ranging from deck safety needs for crabbers working in northern waters to policy changes for Pacific Island States. Among the presenters were seven speakers sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organization who provided overviews of commercial fishing safety programs in developing countries, including Tonga, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Senegal, and Chile.

An emphasis on practical solutions for fishing safety emerged in presentations given throughout the conference. Speakers discussed slip-resistant footwear, orientation and safety programs for new seafood processor workers from rural Alaska, and programs for increasing physical fitness for Faroese Islander fishermen. Other speakers focused on findings from recent fishing vessel disasters and discussed ways that fishing vessel owners and crew could prevent such events. All had the opportunity to present their findings and answer questions from the audience.

IFISH II's focus on safer working environments for commercial fishermen is part of a growing international emphasis on the need for collaboration among governments, nongovernmental entities, vessel owners and operators, and fishermen themselves to develop effective safety programs. Our hope is that these proceedings contribute to these efforts by underscoring the hazards that commercial fishermen face each day at work and by illustrating the many ways in which collaborative partnerships can help promote safer fishing throughout the world.

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