

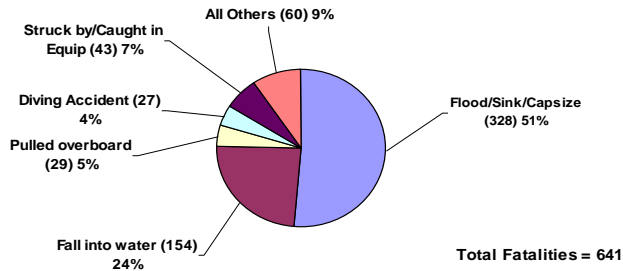


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Issue 4E

Falls Overboard on Fishing Vessels

**F/V Deaths, By Accident Type
1994 - 2004**



Fishermen are taking a risk if they work on decks of commercial fishing vessels without wearing personal flotation devices.

Falls overboard are the second leading cause of commercial fishing vessel fatalities. With three-quarters of all fatalities, water exposure is by far the most significant factor in the loss of life; many die from drowning or hypothermia. People can survive longer in warmer waters – but not indefinitely. For incidents where survival suit and personal flotation device (PFD) usage is known, fishermen survive more than twice as often when the survival equipment is properly used. Deaths can be avoided when lifesaving equipment is available and properly used, as required by the existing regulations in Title 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

The highest number of fall overboard fatalities occurred in the Gulf of Mexico region (40%). In general, the risk of falling overboard can be reduced by wearing a flotation device and quicker, easier retrieval from the water, especially in cold water.

To reduce the risk of falling overboard:

- Use safety lines (also known as guy lines, jack lines, jill lines, and dog lines) when possible.
- Install or extend guard rails where possible.
- Keep decks as clean and clear as possible to prevent slipping or tripping.
- Use nonskid material on decks.

To increase the chances for successful rescues from the water:

- Always wear a flotation device while on deck even if it is not an approved PFD. Any flotation device will improve your chances of survival.
- Have a rescue plan and practice it frequently. A rescue system is recommended.

- Never go out on deck alone.
- Ensure that more than one person on board is familiar with and can operate the vessel and any retrieval gear in an emergency. Proficiency in maneuvering a vessel is essential to a successful rescue.

USCG-Approved PFDs: Types III and V

Types III and V PFDs are suitable for comfortable wear while on the deck for many operations.

Type III PFDs (flotation aids such as vests and float coats) are any approved wearable devices so that wearers can place themselves in a vertical or slightly backward position in the water.

Wearing Type III vests over or under rain gear allows fairly good mobility. Unfortunately, these vests will not turn an unconscious person face up in the water, nor do they offer much protection from hypothermia.

Type V PFDs (work vests, pullover vests, coveralls, work suits, deck suits) are a broad category of PFDs. Anti-exposure coveralls, work suits, and deck suits provide fair hypothermia protection, especially if the waist straps, leg straps, and velcro around the wrists and ankles are snug. Most coveralls have an inflatable pillow that will keep the wearer's head out of the water. However, the coveralls will not turn an unconscious person face up in the water. They are a good choice for cold weather.

Type V hybrids are approved wearable device. It combines limited inherent buoyancy with an air bladder designed to be inflated by a CO₂ cartridge or by mouth. Some inflate automatically in the water. Type V hybrids may be the most comfortable USCG-approved PFD to wear while working. Maintenance and care of the inflating devices are critical if the PFD is to perform as intended.

Even if you choose not to wear an approved PFD, wear some device that provides flotation. Then take care of it and WEAR IT, WEAR IT, WEAR always when on deck.

