

Coast Guard urges safety, preparedness for Dungeness crab season

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The Coast Guard urges commercial fishermen to ensure vessel safety to prevent maritime emergencies before the opening of the Dungeness crab season scheduled to begin Dec. 16.

Marine Investigators from Marine Safety Unit Portland have responded to over 95 marine casualties involving commercial fishing vessels so far this year. The term “marine casualty” is often misunderstood by mariners and is essentially any non-standard event that disrupts normal operations; like an emergency, accident, collision or damage involving a vessel that occurs upon the navigable waters of the United States.

Certain marine casualties are required to be reported to the Coast Guard and are identified in 46 CFR 4.05-1.

Immediately after addressing the resultant safety concerns, the owner, agent, master, operator, or persons-in-charge of a vessel engaged in commercial service, shall notify the nearest Coast Guard Sector Office whenever a vessel is involved in a marine casualty, involving a loss of life, injuries requiring professional medical treatment (treatment beyond first aid), grounding, bridge collision, loss of main propulsion,

reduction in the maneuverability of the vessel, an occurrence causing property damage in excess of \$75,000, or an occurrence involving significant harm to the environment.

In addition to the immediate notice requirement, a written report is also required. The owner, agent, master, operator or person-in-charge, shall, within five days, file a written report on Form CG-2692 (Report of Marine Accident Injury, or Death). Failure to make an immediate notification or subsequently file the written report within five days could result in imposed fines not to exceed \$40,640.

The Coast Guard reminds all commercial fishermen that prior to crossing a restricted bar between sunset and sunrise, they must notify the Coast Guard on VHF-FM channel 16 or 22A to provide their vessel name, position, number of people aboard, destination and any vessel limitations. After crossing, they are required to report back a safe transit or otherwise.

Life jackets or immersion suits must be worn by all persons on deck, or located in any open areas of the vessel while crossing a restricted bar. Life jackets or immersion suits are required to be readily accessible for all persons located in any enclosed spaces of vessels when crossing a bar with restrictions in place. Life jackets are also required whenever a vessel is undertow or while being escorted across the bar by the Coast Guard.

Failure to comply with these requirements may result in a maximum civil penalty of \$25,000.

“Without a doubt, Dungeness crab fishermen are anxious to start the 2020-21 commercial crab fishing season,” said Lt. Carl Eschler, the assistant chief of the investigations division at Coast Guard Marine Safety Unit Portland. “Be it their first time or 101st time navigating over a bar, fishermen are encouraged to contact their local Coast Guard station to familiarize themselves with bar conditions and reporting methods.

Contacting the Coast Guard prior to crossing a restricted bar between sunset and sunrise is more than just a good idea for commercial fishermen, it is a requirement.”