

EYE INJURIES

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Longlining, salmon trolling and crab fishing were listed as those fisheries most dangerous to eyes. In longlining, the risk of flying hooks on longline gear on a rolling deck was mentioned as the greatest risk. In salmon troll fisheries, eye injuries result from impact with flashers and hooks as gear is brought on deck. Plastic flashers pose less risk. Being lighter and thicker, they do not fly out of the water as easily as metal flashers. Fishers also noted that the quick pace of the crab fishery led to eye injuries. When crab are taken out of pots and put into holds, people are working fast. Carelessly tossed crabs can strike workers.

Other causes of eye injuries include fish spitting out hooks, jellyfish (especially in the seine fishery), and bile or fish guts getting into the eyes during gutting operations. The latter also can be caused indirectly by wiping eyes with fish slimed hands.

Eye-injury prevention in the fishing industry is not easy. Gear that causes injury is basic to the industry. Gear is used because it catches fish effectively, despite its eye injury potential. Coincidentally, some fisheries are switching to safer gear just because it is more efficient. The use of "stuck" hooks on longline reduces fishers' contact with hooks as line is played out. Increased use of maintenance-free plastic flashers over metal flashers in the troll industry, as previously mentioned, may result in less injury.

In addition, the management of fisheries resulting in less frenzied derby-style fishing has potential to lessen injuries of all kinds. Yet, the effect of fisheries management on safety has not been fully studied. However, anecdotal reports from coastal fishing village clinics note fewer injuries of all kinds when derby-style fisheries are eliminated.

TOP FIVE ALASKA INDUSTRIES REPORTING WORK-RELATED EYE INJURIES 1991-1996

| INDUSTRY | NUMBER OF NON-SEVERE INJURIES | NUMBER OF SEVERE INJURIES | TOTAL INJURIES |
|---------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| FISHING | 16 | 3 | 19 |
| CONSTRUCTION | 11 | 3 | 14 |
| LOGGING | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| MILITARY | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| AIR TRANSPORT | 2 | 3 | 5 |

Goggles or safety glasses are obvious eye injury prevention equipment. However, constantly having to wipe glasses of rain, spray and fish gore may make these impractical while fishing. They may, in fact, increase the risk of infection by exposing the eyes to fish gore covered gloves and hands, when glasses are removed for cleaning. Use of clear, layered, tear-off acetate sheets, similar to those worn by dirt bike riders, is possible. These are placed over glasses or goggles and removed as accumulated grime cuts visibility.

A long-term threat to eyesight is ultraviolet (UV) light. These damaging rays cause cataract damage to people who work and play on the water. A long-term East Coast study showed that commercial fishers are especially at risk due to the long time they spend on the water. High quality sunglasses that shield eyes from UV rays and glare on the water, help reduce the risk of damage. They also offer protection from injury. Since fishers can see into the water better while wearing sunglasses, they are often standard equipment on fishing vessels.

Although occupational risks have been emphasized, obviously recreational fishers also risk some of the same injuries.

The previous article was condensed from a draft of a study on work-related eye injuries in Alaska. The study is being undertaken by Brad Husberg from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health field research office in Anchorage, AK.

AMSEA is interested in hearing what *Marine Safety Update* readers perceive as problems and solutions to eye injuries onboard. Please send your comments to AMSEA, P.O. Box 2592, Sitka, AK 99835 or E-mail amsea@ptialaska.net.

KEEP LIFE RAFT INSTRUCTIONS IN HANDY LOCATION

With each new raft, life raft purchasers receive information on life raft launching and use. It is a good idea to keep these instructions in the safety instruction book required on all documented fishing vessels that work outside the Boundary Line as per 46 CFR 28.265.

All participants in AMSEA's USCG Approved Drill Instructor courses receive a safety instruction book as required by law. However, this instruction book does not include information on life rafts because there are differences due to brand and type. The safety instruction book is also a good place to keep other safety-related information unique to an individual vessel or crew.