



PRESS RELEASE

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Date:

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Researchers Launch New Lifejacket Van That Aims to Make Lifejacket Use Easy and Affordable for Lobstermen

According to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, Lobster fishing deaths accounted for the highest number of occupational fatalities in East Coast fisheries from 2010-2014. Most of these deaths were related to falls overboard (50%) or vessel disasters (30%) and based on fatality report narratives, none of the recovered victims was wearing a lifejacket.

Researchers at the Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (NEC) have been working with lobstermen in Maine and Massachusetts over the past few years to understand why lifejacket use has been relatively uncommon among fishermen in this fishery sector. Feedback from the community has pointed to a number of barriers to lifejacket use that the NEC and their partners (Fishing Partnership Support Services, Maine Lobstermen's Association, Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association, McMillian Offshore Survival Training and the Atlantic Offshore Lobstermen's Association) plan to address with a "Lifejackets for Lobstermen" campaign.

According to the Project's Coordinator, Rebecca Weil, the campaign will launch in April of 2019 and will address the prior barriers that lobstermen have experienced when considering lifejackets. "We've been working with lobstermen over the past few years to identify user-friendly, commercially available lifejackets and fortunately, we have identified many that lobstermen find appealing. We have also discovered that choosing a lifejacket is really a matter of personal preference, so fishermen need to have a number of options to consider, as well as information on the various features that will likely meet their specific work needs".

To access easy and affordable options, Weil states that the campaign will feature two lifejacket vans that will drive to ports in Maine and Massachusetts. The vans will provide lifejacket options at a one-time discount and will allow fishermen to try them on, get information about the various options

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available and learn about additional technology that can improve fishermen's chances of recovery and survival in the event of a fall overboard.

In addition to improving access to affordable lifejackets, the campaign seeks to make the process of getting and using lifejackets, a positive, fun experience. "The Lifejackets for Lobstermen campaign is really more than just a mobile van that carries lifejackets, it's about bringing the community together to celebrate and support a very important segment of coastal economies. We have been working with local partners to promote the vans and organize fun and engaging activities wherever possible in the various ports that the vans will service", says Julie Sorensen, the Project's Director. The vans will be visiting ports in Maine and Massachusetts throughout the spring, summer and early fall of 2019.

Over the next few months, the research group and its partners hope to make lifejacket use the norm in the lobster fishing community. As Captain Mark Ring, in Gloucester MA said, "They are bringing safety to the fleet, one boat at a time". If the vans prove successful, NEC researchers plan to work with local partners, community members, retailers, and fishing groups to develop a transition plan that will ensure the sustainability of the program through local ownership. Most importantly, they hope to improve fishermen's chances of survival and markedly reduce fatalities in the lobster fishing industry in the coming years.

The NEC is funded through the Centers for Disease Control to address prominent occupational safety and health hazards in agricultural, forestry and fishing communities throughout the Northeast. In addition to conducting research and developing safety programs, the Center offers safety training, health screening and counseling services to agricultural, forestry and fisheries workers.

To find out more about the Lifejackets for Lobstermen campaign, individuals can visit the project Facebook page for updates <https://www.facebook.com/LifejacketsforLobstermen> or contact project staff via email at LifejacketProject@bassett.org

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