

## **LIFE LINE COULD BE MISNAMED**

### **The Story**

A father and his son were fishing from the father's wooden commercial fishing vessel off the coast of California, some 135 miles southwest of San Francisco. The 40.5-foot boat was rigged with 10 fishing lines locally known as "jig" lines. Early in the morning, the wind was blowing at 22 to 35 knots from the northwest with a sea of 8 to 10 feet. The boat was equipped with 5-inch-diameter poles about 25 feet long secured at their bases amidships. Attached to the outboard ends of each of the two poles is a 15-inch-diameter sphere. This system, known as "flopper droppers", served to stabilize the craft. This vessel was not Coast Guard inspected, nor was it required to be.

Several fish had been caught and lying on deck when the son decided to wash down the deck. He decided to use a bucket to get sea water for that purpose instead of using the available water pump. He leaned over the lifeline, using it for support, and dipped his bucket into the sea. Suddenly the bucket caught a wave, and the lifeline parted. The son fell overboard. Although the son knew how to swim, he was dressed in heavy clothing, oilskins, and rubber hip boots, which made swimming difficult if not impossible.

The father immediately reversed the boat's engine and notified the Coast Guard. The vessel backed down over her fishing gear, but the father had difficulty swinging her as he desired. He threw several life preservers overboard, none of them falling within reach of his son. He then tried to maneuver the starboard stabilizer within reach of his son, but to no avail. Seconds later the father watched his son disappear beneath the surface. After unsuccessfully searching the area for about 5 hours, the father departed. He was joined in his search by a Coast Guard fixed-wing aircraft, but the son was never seen again.

A subsequent examination of the fishing boat revealed the lifeline which had parted was a plastic-covered 3/16-inch-diameter, multi-strand, galvanized cable, rigged 15 inches above the bulwark. The plastic was stripped off the ends of the line where it was secured to the thimbles by swagged collars. The exposed ends were rusty and corroded.

### **Lesson Learned**

*The conclusion is inescapable that the breaking of a badly corroded lifeline which the son was leaning against was the primary cause of the casualty. Contributory causes of the apparent drowning of the son were the heavy apparel, especially*

*the rubber hip boots he was wearing, and the difficulty the father had in maneuvering the boat after the son had fallen overboard caused by the extended fishing gear. This casualty proves that a lifeline, to warrant that title, must protect lives. This one failed to do that because it was allowed to corrode. Lifelines should be periodically inspected and properly maintained to live up to their name.*

**Prevention Through People**



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