

HSE for fisheries

Occupational Health Service Provider Interviews
Finland / June 2014

Summary of four telephone interviews in Finland

(comments added by the interviewer are denoted underlined/italics)

Clients and client potential

In total twelve fishermen had joined the four interviewed OH services. Two fishermen had not been reached lately and three had fishing as a secondary occupation (two of them were farmers by main occupation). No knowledge base is available for the OH service providers to estimate how many active fishermen exist in the area, or to contact them.

OH Service Contracting

The actual contracts for the fisher to participate to the OH services are very similar to those made with farmers. No special contract forms exist for fishers.

Promotion of OH services

There are no actual promotional activities for fishermen. It is up to the fisher to take contact. Occasionally there are campaigns arranged by the Finnish Social Insurance Institution Mela, but these are for farmers. There are probably no trade journals for professional fishers, that could be used for this (not quite true). Part time fishers often have farming as their main occupation, so this way some fishers are introduced to the OH services. On the farming side there are quite well established networks and promotional acts. E.g. the starting farmers get good information on the OH services in the materials for farms that are making a generation shift. Information on the OH services is also available on the Internet. It is not easily found though, and there has to be active interest into the matter for anybody to find it. There is readiness to promote the services more actively, e.g. at events that are arranged by the fishers' organizations.

General about OHS services

Health checks are done every 2 years and workplace checks once in four years. The OHS nurse contacts the client and agrees on a meeting at the health care center or at the client's workplace. All OH activities are based on a OHS plan that is made together with the client during the initial health check and workplace visit. It is mandatory to create this plan and there's a follow-up to it. The plan can include e.g. suggestions on changes in the workplace or a scheduled training or fitness course.

Health checks

At the health check, a physical assessment is made. General stress factors as well as mental wellbeing are being discussed. If needed, a consultation assignment is being made via the Farmers' Social Insurance Institute. This can involve for instance a consultation from a fisheries expert, who also can be invited to join the workplace visit.

Workplace checks

A fishery expert can be asked to join the visit, but this is not often done (probably because of the added cost involved – which might be a misunderstanding, because this extra cost is being compensated). Some exposure measurements can be made on the workplace (noise, lighting, temperature). For more in-depth measurements, locally contracted companies can be used, but these have not been used in conjunction with fisheries.

There are no generally available, special check lists or other material for doing workplace checks onboard fishing boats, on landings, or other fishery premises. The materials that are made for farms are being used where it is feasible. This also goes for the OH plan. Some single service providers have created their own check lists.

Special concerns expressed during contacts with fishermen

Special concerns come up very seldom, but there is one thing that keeps repeating: the stress of injury risk when working alone. There is only so much that can be done to mitigate this. Basically, use of PPE and self-rescue equipment are the only ways here.

General health concerns and uncertainty of being able to continue in the profession are expressed.

Typical expressed risks include slipperiness and lifting heavy loads. The ergonomics of work tasks are checked and improvement proposals are made during workplace checks. Unfortunately there are seldom possibilities to observe real fishing work on the sea.

Coldness is a special problem when fishing on ice covered waters. The fishers use snow scooters to get to their fishing sites, and there is hardly any shelter from the cold breeze.

Economical concerns and a continuous fight to justify and maintain the occupation create a lot of stress.

Development ideas

It would be good to have fishery specific tools for health and workplace checks. There is also a clear need for the OHS service personnel to get to know the fishing profession, work tasks and environment. There could also be fishery specific promotional materials, the like there are for farmers. It is important to also discuss social wellbeing during the visits. If the OH service providers had contact details of fishermen in their area, they could possibly make contacts and promote their services. Check lists/forms could maybe be sent some days before the actual visit to the workplace/health care center, so the client could prepare him/herself for the discussion.

Why have so few fishermen joined the OH services?

The biggest reason is probably lack of knowledge of the services (possibility to join, content, benefits, costs). There is no active promotion. If the services have been contracted to a public health care center, they actually can't actively advertise because it is against the regulations on free market competition. The OH service providers are not aware of the customer potential in their area. Fishers who have fishing as their main occupation are getting less all the time. Part time fishers maybe join the OSH system as farmers or other kind of entrepreneurs.

Other considerations

Some fishermen who participate to the service seem to experience it a bit difficult to receive improvement suggestions concerning injury prevention or making their work more ergonomic.