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Gord has run his own communications and business-consulting firm for 24 years. He brings us “Ask an officer” (right) and the COVID-19 cover story (page 7).



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Marnie is a Kelowna-based writer and communications professional who began her career in journalism. Her “Safety talk” covers ergonomics at home (page 16).



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Gillie Easdon is a writer specializing in communications, blogs, websites, grant writing, articles, and creative work. She covers student videos on safety (page 22).



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# Reducing the risk of capsizing



### Jessie Kunce, CRSP, RSE Occupational safety officer

**Region:** Victoria

**Years on the job:** 8

Loss of vessel stability is one of the main hazards in commercial fishing. It increases the risk of capsizing and has led to many serious injuries and fatalities. WorkSafeBC recently published a new stability hazard alert for fishing vessel employers and crew. In this issue, occupational safety officer Jessie Kunce explains how to reduce the risk of capsizing.

### Q. What are the factors that can affect my boat's stability?

**A.** When I'm conducting an inspection, I always look at the freeboard (the distance from the waterline to the upper deck) for notable lists or excessive trim. Either of these are red flags that indicate there could be something wrong.

There are many factors that affect stability. Once I'm onboard, and have identified who's who on the boat, I usually start by asking these questions:

- How long have you been working on this boat in this fishery?
- Is she tender or stiff when fully loaded?
- Is everything on deck secure? This includes, gear, totes, extra fuel, excess fish, etc. Load shift alone can capsize a vessel.
- Has the vessel been modified?
- Is this the only fishery she partakes in?

The list goes on, but these are good questions that lead to more specific questions that help me identify potential hazards for the crew to address.

### Q. What often gets overlooked when it comes to vessel stability?

**A.** When fishing is good, it can be tempting to overload the boat — often referred to as deck loading. It can be really dangerous. Masters may do

it without really knowing how close they are to losing their righting-lever. It's a fine line some choose to dance on.

The state of the fish stocks, and other economic factors, have pushed fishermen toward converting vessels to fish more than one species. Many of these vessels are aging and some not so gracefully. As a result, you start to see weight creep as more and more fishing gear, spare parts, and stores from other fisheries accumulate on the boat. Even multiple layers of paint on the hull can start to add up to a lot of extra weight.

Equipment maintenance can sometimes also get overlooked. For example, a pump may not be working well and the engineer knows this but isn't given the time or resources needed to maintain it. It might not seem like a big deal at the time, but when you're at sea it can turn into a really big problem.

**Q. I'm an employer and a master runs my boat. What are our responsibilities for safety?**

- A.** Some vessels require a comprehensive stability book and full stability assessments from a naval architect, others do not. But all vessels require documentation describing the vessel's stability characteristics.

You need to ensure that any major modifications to the vessel don't adversely affect stability. You have an obligation to ensure the master is instructed, knowledgeable, and capable of operating your vessel for that fishery.

During inspections, I like to find out just how much the masters know about the limitations of their boat and crew. If they know their boat, they are more than happy to share the ins and outs of their ship.

**Q. What can I do as a crew member to stay safe?**

- A.** First, always wear your PFD (personal flotation

device) when on deck. Your master needs to train, instruct, and supervise you, so definitely ask questions. Point out things you don't understand and don't make assumptions about what's okay. Make sure you know the hazards on the boat. Pay attention to anything you think could be a problem and do not hesitate to alert the master. Remember that you have the right and responsibility to refuse unsafe work.

**Q. What are some safe work practices we can follow?**

- A.** Communication is so important on a boat. How well you work as a team makes all the difference. Make sure the crew knows the characteristics of vessel stability and where the hazard points are. All crew should be empowered to ask questions and report any safety concerns.

Make sure hatch covers are secured, and any downflooding points are closed up tight. Don't stow weights and stores up high as it raises the centre of gravity. Reduce the free surface effect by keeping scuppers clear.

Always record and report any modifications you make to your vessel; even if they seem minor, they add up.

**Q. Where can I find more information?**

- A.** You can download our hazard alert by searching [worksafebc.com](https://worksafebc.com) for "fishing vessel stability bulletin." You can also search for "fish harvesting alert" to learn how modifying your vessel can affect its stability.

FishSafeBC also has free information at [fishsafebc.com](https://fishsafebc.com).

Looking for answers to your specific health and safety questions? Send them to us at [worksafemagazine@worksafebc.com](mailto:worksafemagazine@worksafebc.com), and we'll consider them for our next "Ask an officer" feature. 🗨️

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