

# Sea Grant Postcard from the Field



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## Safety First

Connecticut Sea Grant safety training helps fishermen survive a dangerous job



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- Ed Dennehy, Fishing Partnership Support Services



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Commercial fisherman Chris Fowler knows the perils of his occupation, consistently ranked one of nation's the most dangerous jobs.

So a year after he began catching skate, whiting, squid, flounder and fluke from a vessel docked in New London, CT, he took a day off from fishing to equip himself with the skills he needs to survive an accident at sea.

"This is my first training since I started as a fisherman," said Fowler, his face wet after a drill that involved getting into an bright orange immersion suit, jumping into 50-degree water and climbing onto a four-man life raft.

Fowler was one of 36 commercial fishermen and state agency personnel who took part in a daylong safety and survival training course held in May 2018 that was sponsored by Connecticut Sea Grant, Fishing Partnership Support Services, the U.S. Coast Guard and UConn-Avery Point. The training began with classroom lessons on first aid, use of life jackets and opioid awareness before heading to the waterfront for training in firefighting, making emergency vessel repairs and using flares and other emergency equipment.

The Fishing Partnership provided instructors for the training, several of whom are former commercial fishermen or served in the Coast Guard.

"Fishing is the most dangerous occupation, so our focus is to give hands-on training so they [fishermen] know what equipment to use and how to use it," said Ed Dennehy, director of safety training for the Fishing Partnership.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health recommends fishermen take

formal training classes like this one at least every five years. Connecticut Sea Grant has been sponsoring trainings since 2000, and teamed up with the Fishing Partnership in 2016, said [Nancy Balcom](#), associate director of Connecticut Sea Grant and lead organizer of the training.

About 80% of participants at the May training were first-timers, and the rest were there for refresher lessons.

"[Fishermen] should do this training every two to three years because there's always something you didn't pick up the first time," Dennehy said, "Sea Grant has been a really great partner with us on this."

Connecticut Sea Grant's safety training is one of many ways Sea Grant encourages safe boating to both commercial and recreational boaters across the country.

*Original article*

*Image description:* Five photos (all courtesy of Judy Benson/CT Sea Grant). Clockwise from left: Fishermen jump into the water to practice using their immersion suits; two photos of commercial fishermen practicing getting into a life raft; Alissa Dragan, center, and Kristin Russo, right, of the CT Bureau of Aquaculture, practice extinguishing fires; and fishermen practice lighting emergency flares.

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