

Fishing boat capsizes in Tillamook Bay; four rescued, one dies

by Cheryl McDermott

Four men were rescued from the 58-foot fishing vessel, Starrigavin, after it wrecked on the south jetty of Tillamook Bay near Garibaldi, Oregon on Thursday night, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) public affairs office reported.

One of the crewmembers that was seriously injured, identified as Kenneth Russell Venard, 50, later died at Tillamook County General Hospital.

The Thirteenth District Coast Guard Command Center was alerted to the incident at 9:25 p.m. when the vessel's emergency position indicating radio beacon activated. A concerned citizen who spotted the distressed vessel called moments later and confirmed the vessel's location.

Starrigavin, Adak Island, AK, 2003

USCG Station Tillamook Bay dispatched a 47-foot motor lifeboat crew and Air Station Astoria launched an HH-60 helicopter crew in response to the emergency. When the helicopter arrived on scene, a radio was lowered to a crewmember below who reported Venard was injured. The injured man was airlifted and transported to waiting emergency medical service workers. Venard was then taken to Tillamook County General Hospital where he later died of his injuries.

The cause of the incident remains under investigation, but crew members told the Coast Guard high seas and winds rolled the 58-foot vessel. The Coast Guard describes Tillamook Bay as having a "tricky entrance bar that breaks frequently", the public affairs office said. It is the site of numerous boating accidents, including the 2003 capsizing of the 36-foot Taki-Too charter boat when eleven people, including the captain, died in the accident.

The ship's master of the Starrigavin was identified as 23-year old Kirk Opheim of Burlington, Washington, said PA2 Shawn Eggert with the USCG 13th District. Also on board were Gregory Phillips, 23, of Siletz, and Sam Johnson, 39, of Seattle.

According to a USCG news release, ship's master Opheim was arrested on December 23, 2006 for boating under the influence of intoxicants. He registered a .13 blood alcohol level -- nearly twice the legal limit -- when he arrived onshore at the Pacific Shrimp pier in Newport. A subsequent boarding of the Starrigavin by Coast Guard members revealed several safety violations for which Opheim was cited.

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