

The Hazards of Tug Operations



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By [Daniel Bookham](#)

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It almost goes without saying in the pages of WorkBoat that the nation's tugboat crews are the sinew and muscle that bind the body of maritime and inland waterway trade together. An indispensable part of marine commerce, tugboat operations also present a range of dangers and hazards that can lead to significant insurance claims. An awareness of those hazards can go a long way towards mitigating the risks to vessels, crews, tows, and other folks on or near the water.

Even for old hands and experienced operators, a review of risks can be a good jumping off point for both preventative planning and mitigation of loss should one occur.

Collisions. Tugs often operate in crowded and congested waters, which increases the risk of collisions with other vessels. Collisions can cause significant damage to both vessels involved, as well as to any cargo or property on board.

Groundings. Going aground can cause damage to the boat's hull and propulsion system and can also lead to spills of fuel or other hazardous materials.

Fires and explosions. More frequent than you'd think, fires and explosions can occur on tugboats for a variety of reasons, such as electrical malfunctions, fuel leaks, or welding accidents. Fires and explosions can cause significant damage to the tug and its crew and can also lead to environmental damage.

Mechanical failures. As many of us know too well, even on a well-maintained vessel mechanical failure can occur at any time. Crew injuries. Tugs have the potential to be dangerous workplaces if we aren't careful, and crew members can be injured in a variety of ways, such as falls from heights, slips and trips, or exposure to hazardous materials.

Theft and vandalism. Tugs and their equipment can be targets for theft and vandalism. Theft and vandalism can cause significant financial losses to the tugboat owner or operator.

Cargo damage. If a tow is not properly secured, it can be damaged or lost during transport.

As I've highlighted in past columns, a strong and organic safety culture that runs from the greenest crew member to the company leadership is the key to minimizing claims and potential financial loss and injury that can have significant business and emotional impacts on your company and its people.

Communication, training, the ability of anyone to flag a potential issue, and a commitment to "catch people doing something right" and celebrating smart behavior makes the difference. You also need to ensure that your barges, tugboats and docks are outfitted with the right tools and gear to support your safety culture; staying abreast of industry best practice and not cutting corners is key. Finally, owners and operators should purchase adequate insurance coverage to protect themselves against the financial losses that can result from claims, as even the best managed vessels and fleets can find

themselves with a claim on their hands. They call them accidents for a reason.

Death, Taxes and Change...What's in Store for 2024



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We've all heard the adage that the only things that are sure in this life are death and taxes...we need to be mindful of change, at least as it pertains to taxes.

Retirement Savings

It's important to maximize saving for retirement and take advantage of the provision of the tax law that allow taxpayers to save funds in tax-deferred accounts...for 2024, the limit on most plans (401(k), 403(b) and 457 plans) increases from \$22,500 to \$23,000 with another \$7,500 for those age 50 and over. That

means that taxpayers age 50 and over can add \$30,500 to their plans in 2024, the highest amount ever allowed.

Similarly, SIMPLE plans will have new elective deferral limits: \$16,000 up from \$15,500 and a catch-up amount of \$3,500 for those 50 and over. IRAs will have a 2024 contribution limit of \$7,000 up from \$6,500 this year, with an unchanged catch-up amount of \$1,000 for those 50 and older.

There are other changes for SEPs, ESOPs and cash-balance plans in store for 2024. For those who participate in them, taxpayers should consult their accountants and financial advisors for more details. Why maximize savings in these types of plans and accounts? Earnings in these plans are tax free until withdrawn, which for many is not required until age 73 or if born in 1960 or later, age 75.

Gift and Estate Tax

Taxpayers can make gifts or have an estate of over \$13 million in 2024 without having a federal gift or estate tax imposed. The maximum amount that may be given as a gift without having to report it to the IRS to count against that credit – what is known as the annual exclusion amount – is going up to \$18,000 for 2024 from \$17,000 in 2023. This amount has been increasing steadily over the past several years.

Corporate Transparency Act

Taking effect in 2024 is a new federal law to help the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCen) uncover criminal activity through corporations, LLCs and the like. It requires certain types of existing entities to report beneficial ownership information by December 31, 2024 and for new entities formed after this year, to make such reports within 30 days of formation. If you are an owner or have a beneficial interest in a corporation or LLC or other entity that is formed by filing

documents with the state, you may be required to make reports. For more information, go to <https://www.fincen.gov/boi>.

Please remember that financial and tax situations differ widely from person to person, and there is no one size fits all for most of these situations. Consult with your financial and tax advisors for how any of these or other provisions that are changing in 2024 may affect you.

Martha Wentworth Tapped to Work with Maine Bureau of Insurance's Continuing Education Advisory Board

[Martha Wentworth](#), CIC, CRM, CPRM, business insurance producer in Allen's Waterville office, has been asked to work with the Maine Bureau of Insurance's Continuing Education Advisory Board, where she joins [Sally Miles](#), Operations Director at Allen, as part of the group shaping the professional development of insurance agents in Maine. To have two members of our team serve on this body is recognition of both their personal experience and skillsets, as well as the regard the agency is held in by peers, carriers, and regulators alike. Their contributions will undoubtedly make a significant impact, benefiting not only the committee but also all our insurance industry colleagues across Maine.