

Alaska Fisherman's Journal

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EDITORIAL

Case Closed?

The question is not: Who left the door open on the Arctic Rose?

The question is: Why was this vessel sailing at all?

It might be convenient to pin the entire tragedy on a careless factory foreman or an undocumented Mexican worker who didn't understand the difference between "open" and "shut." But this is not an open and shut incident. And while the Coast Guard has closed its investigation, there is a lot more we could and should have learned.

How much did owner David Olney know about his vessel?

How much stability information should he have requested from the naval architects at Jensen Maritime Consultants?

How much fish did Olney expect his captains to catch? And how fast did he expect them to bring it aboard?

Did Olney provide his captains with stability information and discuss it? Was it accurate information? Did the skipper and first mate know where the stability booklet was and how to use it? Did they know that the baseline weights were off by at least 20,000 pounds? Did they know how that changed the loading table?

Did the skipper and first mate know they were hauling fish loads and burning fuel in a manner forbidden by the stability booklet instructions? Did they know the booklet limited their initial hauls to no more than 5,000 pounds of fish? Did they know that all of the fish from each tow had to be out of the freezers, in the hold or otherwise off the deck before they hauled another bag? Did they know there were no "fudge factors" built into the loading table?

How many captains and first mates would have sailed aboard the Arctic Rose if they had understood those rules and if the owner had enforced them?

What were the new rules once the owner added 20,000 pounds of concrete and boiler shot to the bilge?

Did the owners of the Arctic Rose actively ignore the true condition of the vessel and then send it to the Bering Sea in winter with 15 people aboard?

The Coast Guard should answer these questions in no uncertain terms. And the rest of this industry should pay attention to the answers.

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