Homer-Based Longliner Forced Aground in Unalaska

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Lauren Rosenthal/KUCB

High winds and rough seas drove the fishing vessel Chaos onto the rocks outside Unalaska Friday night -- and delayed a Coast Guard air rescue of the ship's crew.

The Chaos is a 54-foot longliner based out of Homer. Coast Guard Petty Officer Sara Mooers says the four crew members pulled into Unalaska Bay on Friday night to ride out a heavy storm.

“They were at anchor and the high winds actually broke their anchor and pushed them ashore. They contacted the harbormaster who then contacted us.”

The Coast Guard sent an MH-65 Dolphin helicopter from its forward base in Cold Bay, along with an MH-60 Jayhawk from Kodiak.

The pilots tried to pick up the Chaos crew right away, but Mooers says the storm turned them back.

“The winds we were dealing with … were 50 miles per hour sustained, with gusts to 83 and rain. It was just more than we could hoist safely in.”

The helicopter crews were able to confirm that the vessel was intact on the rocks, and not leaking fuel. They asked the fishermen to stay put and wait for calmer weather.

But around midnight, the Chaos crew decided to spend the rest of the night on land. Mooers says the fishermen notified the Unalaska harbor office that they were swimming to shore and hiking to a protected cove.

“They took some flares with them to be able to signal the helicopters at first light, so we were able to find them quite easily.”

The MH-60 Jayhawk retrieved the fishermen Saturday morning. There were no reports of injuries among them, but an emergency medical crew met them at the airport as a precaution.

Meanwhile, the boat was still on the rocks near Eider Point.

Unalaska's Coast Guard marine safety detachment is monitoring the Chaos for signs of a spill. Petty Officer Jamie Testa says the vessel is holding up to 1,000 gallons of diesel fuel, and Magone Marine has been contacted about a potential salvage operation.