

California Boat Fire Puts Spotlight on Titanic's Legal Defense Using 19th Century Law

The company that owns a scuba dive boat that caught fire and sank off California, killing 34 people, has sought to avoid liability by invoking a 19th-century law that has shielded vessel owners from costly disasters such as the sinking of the Titanic, according to reports from **Reuters** and the ***Los Angeles Times***.

"Accidents that occur on land with a similar death toll could lead to more than \$100 million in damages, lawyers said," Reuters reports. "But on the water, maritime law applies, and any lawsuits will run up against the statute invoked late on Thursday by Truth Aquatics, which allows the owner of a vessel and its insurer to escape or severely limit its liability in certain cases."

Owners of the boat have cited an 1851 statute in asking a judge to eliminate their financial liability or lower it to an amount equal to the post-fire value of the boat, or \$0. The owner of the Titanic, which sank in 1912, limited its liability in lawsuits in the United States to \$92,000, which was the value of the lifeboats that survived the accident.

Read the Reuters article.