

15 bodies recovered in Mexico shipwreck

The Miami Herald
Oct. 21, 2007

SAN FRANCISCO IXHUATAN, Mexico --

Authorities have recovered the bodies of 15 Central American migrants whose boat capsized in the Pacific Ocean, the Mexican navy said on Saturday. The vessel was believed to be carrying more than 20 migrants.

Survivor Noemi Martinez, 29, of El Salvador, said the boat departed from Guatemala and capsized Tuesday with more than 20 people aboard, according to Moises Hernandez, regional commander for ministerial police in Oaxaca.

State authorities identified the only other known survivor as Salvadoran Walter Alan, 23.

Search efforts were suspended on Saturday because of heavy rain that flooded rivers and creeks. Earlier, a military helicopter searched the sea while state authorities combed the beach near the towns of San Francisco Ixhuatan and San Francisco del Mar, about 200 miles from the Guatemalan border.

"There are reports of more bodies, but the weather hasn't let us go out to sea," Oaxaca state public safety secretary Sergio Segreste said.

In a news release, the navy said the ship apparently was overloaded and capsized in heavy seas.

Authorities corrected earlier statements by state officials that 24 bodies had washed up in San Francisco del Mar and a nearby town. Oaxaca state authorities on Saturday counted 11 bodies found, and it was not immediately possible to reconcile the discrepancy with information supplied by the navy.

The shipwreck signals that migrant smugglers may be increasingly turning to boats to transport Central Americans through Mexico, avoiding highway checkpoints.

Illegal migrants who used to travel as stowaways on railway freight cars also have been searching for new routes north since train service was interrupted this year on two railway lines.