
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
COMMERCE
NEWS

NATIONAL
OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC
ADMINISTRATION

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NOAA03-129
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Oct. 30, 2003

**VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM AND LITIGATION DATA BASE NET
NOAA FISHERIES PRESTIGIOUS NATIONAL AWARD**

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) received the prestigious *Government Computer News Award* for a unique new vessel monitoring system and also for a litigation database, at an awards program on Oct. 29 in Washington, D.C. NOAA is an agency of the Department of Commerce.

One of ten honorees selected from more than 120 government-wide nominations, NOAA Fisheries was nominated for programs that advance information and communication management within the enforcement and legal counsel systems. "Many of our valuable ocean resources are overfished and fleets everywhere heavily capitalized," said Dr. Bill Hogarth, NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator.

In an effort to deal with these increased challenges, the NOAA Fisheries Office of Enforcement developed the Vessel Monitoring System to track the activities and fish catches of thousands of vessels throughout America's coasts.

The NOAA CIO's Office and the Office of General Counsel together developed the Web-enabled Litigation Database to store, summarize and make readily available case information needed by NOAA attorneys to support resource management decisions.

"Information technology holds the key not only to advancing the Agency's science and fisheries management and is central to improvements in law enforcement and litigation," said Fisheries Chief Information Officer Lawrence Tyminski. "These new programs help us to do our jobs more effectively."

The satellite-based Vessel Monitoring System augments traditional NOAA surveillance, with links to thousands of large boats responsible for the majority of the nation's catch. It provides enforcement agents with the precise location of vessels over both periodic and ad hoc time intervals, and allows agents to direct their efforts to actual or suspected violations.

Each regional system receives tracking data from vessels over the Fisheries-Wide Area Network via the Inmarsat transponder. The data are processed at regional enforcement offices and archived in a national database.

The Litigation Database consists of thousands of cases filed by individual citizens and industry or environmental groups challenging Federal regulations. Until the system's implementation, accessing information on the 100 or so cases active at any one time required time consuming and incomplete manual searches, leaving attorneys little time to compare cases or examine prior decisions.

The new database provides a secure electronic system that allows users to conduct individually tailored searches for case and docket data, reduces errors in administrative processes, and gives NOAA and Department of Commerce administrators immediate information on every aspect of legal challenges to fisheries regulation.

Together, the Vessel Monitoring System and Litigation Database have delivered substantial savings to NOAA and the Department, utilizing economies of scale to reduce operating expenses and better document the administration and enforcement of fisheries laws. In recognition of this contribution to the nation, the two NOAA systems and the Fisheries Chief Information Officer are featured in a video shown for the first time at the Government Computer News Awards Gala.

Government Computer News is the leading news magazine in the information technology (IT) market, reaching more than 87,000 program and technology managers and agency executives. The *Government Computer News Awards* recognize major contributions that further the aims of electronic government and significantly improve agencies' effectiveness in delivering their mission.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources, and the habitat on which they depend, through scientific research, management and enforcement. Stewardship of these resources benefits the nation by supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, while helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

On the Internet:

NOAA - <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries - <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>