



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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NOAA Fisheries Service Promotes Safer Conditions for Northeast Fleets and Fishery Observers

Beginning May 1, 2006 federal commercial fishery observers in the Northeast will only accompany trips on boats that have a valid U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) safety inspection decal, or that have a waiver of the decal requirement from NOAA Fisheries Service.

“We want to reduce risks of injury and loss at sea as much as possible,” said Patricia Kurkul, regional administrator for NOAA Fisheries Service in the Northeast. “This action should not only improve safety conditions on observed trips, but also encourage these valuable and free inspections across the fleet.”

U.S. Coast Guard commercial fishing vessel safety inspections help ensure preparedness for a range of emergencies that can occur on a fishing vessel.

Northeast fishery observers are deployed throughout the year in a range of fisheries. They collect biological samples, document bycatch, and observe fishing practices. The resulting data are used to improve fishery management, and by researchers studying commercially important fish and fisheries.

In recent years, NOAA Fisheries Service in the Northeast has allowed observers to accompany trips on vessels without current inspection decals. The agency decided to adhere to the higher standard in the region because of growing concern about safety at sea across the fishing industry and within the Agency.

After May 1, all vessels that are required to carry observers in the Northeast must meet the USCG safety requirements and display a current examination decal, or obtain a waiver, before an observer can accompany a trip. A vessel that does not have a current decal or a waiver, and is required to take an observer, may not fish.

Vessels can get a waiver of the requirement from NOAA Fisheries Service. Vessels that meet all the inspection requirements except that for a marine sanitation holding tank will qualify for the waiver, and be eligible to take observers without a current safety inspection decal.

“Observers will continue to check out standard emergency equipment before a particular trip, flagging safety issues that arise between inspections,” said David Potter, who manages the Northeast Fishery Observer Program, one of the nation’s largest. “We train our observers in basic safety, but the Coast Guard is better suited to evaluate overall vessel preparedness.”

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, 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. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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On the Web:

USCG Vessel Safety Inspections: www.uscg.mil/hq/g%2Dm/cfvs/

Northeast Fishery Observer Program: <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/femad/fishsamp/fsb/>

Northeast Region Safety Decal Requirement:

<http://www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/hotnews/vsc/index.html>

NOAA Fisheries Service: www.nmfs.noaa.gov

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