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**NOAA Fisheries and United States Coast Guard Sign
Memorandum of Agreement on Observer Safety**

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) and the United States Coast Guard will reinforce the importance of safety for federal fishery observers tomorrow in Silver Spring, Maryland. NOAA Fisheries is an agency of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Dr. William Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries, and RADM Thomas H. Gilmour, U.S. Coast Guard assistant commandant for maritime safety, security, and environmental protection, will sign a Memorandum of Agreement, establishing a protocol between the agencies to ensure the safety and support of fisheries observers nationwide. The signing ceremony will take place on December 21 at 10 a.m. at NOAA's Silver Spring campus, 1315 East-West Highway, Building 3, room 14386. Members of the public and media interested in attending the ceremony should contact NOAA Fisheries in advance.

"NOAA is proud to partner with the Coast Guard to strengthen our ability to keep federal fishery observers safe from harm's way," Hogarth said. "Federal fishery observers provide an important service to the country and it is NOAA's responsibility to establish safety standards and protocols to ensure a secure work environment for them."

This Memorandum of Agreement reinforces federal regulations for observer health and safety. These regulations require that commercial fishing vessels display a current commercial fishing vessel safety decal. Observers are required to use pre-deployment vessel safety checklists to ensure that the vessel's safety equipment is current.

The Coast Guard has indicated that current regulations and voluntary compliance standards have only a limited capability to further reduce the death rate in the commercial fishing industry. This agreement calls for renewed efforts to move beyond existing measures and establish additional safety standards that will substantially increase safety awareness while reducing fishing vessel losses and fatality rates.

NOAA Fisheries deploys more than fishery 500 observers per year on U.S., commercial fishing vessels. They are deployed in over 42 fisheries, on vessels ranging in size from small skiffs to large factory trawlers. Observers collect important fisheries data during more than 60,000 sea days annually. One of the primary objectives of observers is to collect data on bycatch of marine mammals, sea turtles, and sea birds, prohibited species and fishery discards. The collection of fisheries data by observers is among the most reliable methods for managing the resources.