



NOAA NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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NOAA is taking steps to protect sea turtles in the Gulf
Excluder devices save turtles when used properly

With additional areas in the Gulf opening to shrimping on Friday, NOAA is continuing to help fishermen comply with Turtle Excluder Device (TED) regulations designed to prevent turtles from being caught in shrimp trawl nets.

NOAA's Fisheries Service Office of Law Enforcement has put extra personnel along with NOAA's Fisheries Service gear experts at the docks to inspect as many TEDs as possible. By correcting any problems with TEDs dockside, NOAA hopes to minimize sea turtle injuries and deaths through increasing compliance with the TED regulations.

"Helping shrimpers comply before they go out to sea is best for everyone involved—the shrimpers and the sea turtles," said Alan Risenhoover, acting director of NOAA's Fisheries Service Office of Law Enforcement. "I hope that the increased outreach we're doing dockside means fewer violations at sea when the stakes are higher. But at the same time, we're increasing the presence of our enforcement personnel on the water with additional patrols, looking for the minority of shrimpers who fail to comply with the rules."

Regulations under the Endangered Species Act require vessels trawling for shrimp to have a properly installed TED in their nets when rigged for fishing in both offshore and inshore waters of the Gulf of Mexico. A TED is a grid of bars with an opening either at the top or the bottom of the trawl net. The devices allow small animals such as shrimp to pass through into the bag end of the trawl while larger animals, such as sea turtles and sharks, strike the grid bars and are ejected through the opening.

Since January 1, 2011, there have been more than 423 documented strandings of sea turtles in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama – consistent with 2010, but higher than in other previous years.

Since mid-April, NOAA's Fisheries Service Office of Law Enforcement's Southeast Division and NOAA Fisheries' Southeast Science Center's Gear Monitoring Team have conducted more than 100 dockside and 100 at-sea boardings, resulting in 46 verbal and written warnings issued on site. An additional 25 cases have been forwarded to NOAA's Office of General Counsel for Enforcement and Litigation, which reviews cases and determines whether to issue a formal Notice of Violation and Assessment (NOVA). Although enforcement personnel have documented various problems with TEDs – including net makers who had sold TEDs that were out of compliance – the main problems continue to be TED angles that are too high (exceeding 55 degrees) and escape flaps too small to allow turtles to escape nets unscathed.

On July 11, NOAA issued NOVAs for violations involving TEDs to three vessels that allegedly had their device's escape flaps tied shut, one vessel that allegedly had no TEDs installed on the two nets that were being used at the time the vessel was boarded, and five that allegedly had TEDs with escape openings that were too small and/or positioned at too steep an angle to allow turtles to escape.

The NOVAs were issued under NOAA's new nationwide penalty policy, which ensures that proposed penalties are consistent across fisheries and across the country. (The penalty policy is posted at http://www.gc.noaa.gov/documents/031611_penalty_policy.pdf.) Penalties range from \$5,500 to \$26,400 based on the particular facts of the cases, including repeat offenses.

The owner and operators of the shrimp trawlers issued NOVAs have 30 days to respond by paying the penalty, seeking to have it modified or requesting a hearing.

The mission of NOAA's Fisheries Service Office of Law Enforcement is to ensure compliance with the laws and regulations enacted to conserve and protect our nation's marine resources. To report a suspected violation, contact Enforcement's national hotline at 1-800-853-1964.

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and our other [social media channels](#).