

National Marine Fisheries Service, Northeast Fisheries Science Center
Northeast Fisheries Observer Program

Qualifications to Become an At-Sea Observer

The following represent the minimum qualifications required to work as a Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) observer.

Education and Experience -

Candidates must possess a Bachelor's degree with a major in one of the biological sciences from an accredited four-year college or university with at least 30 semester hours in any combination of scientific or technical courses such as biology, chemistry, statistics entomology, animal husbandry, physics or mathematics, of which at least six semester hours are in marine science or fisheries.

One year of specialized experience, performed at an acceptable level, may be substituted for the six semester hours of marine science or fisheries course work. The specialized experience must have been in the field of fisheries and included functions such as:

- a. observing ocean fishing activities;
- b. recording data for marine mammal sighting and fishing activities;
- c. tallying incidental takes of marine mammals, sea turtles and sea birds on fishing vessels; or
- d. collecting biological specimens from postmortem animals.

The education requirement may be waived, on an individual basis, with approval by NMFS/NEFOP.

Candidates must successfully complete the NEFOP Observer Training Course.

CPR (Cardio Pulmonary Respiratory) certification by the American Red Cross or the American Heart Association is required.

Basic First Aid class certification is required.

Candidates must not have been terminated or decertified as an observer, due to problems with data quality or standards of conduct, in any other NMFS observer program.

Physical Condition -

Candidates have to be certified by a physician to be physically fit to work as an observer on a commercial fishing vessel. The physician must understand the observer's job and working conditions. Physical considerations include, but are not limited to:

- a. Susceptibility to chronic motion sickness;
- b. Ability to live in confined quarters;
- c. Ability to tolerate stress;
- d. Ability to lift and carry heavy objects up to 50 pounds;
- e. Ability to drag heavy objects up to 200 pounds; and

- f. Ability to climb a ladder.

Observer candidates will be asked to demonstrate their ability to do the following during Observer Training:

- a. Swim 100 meters;
- b. Tread water for three minutes;
- c. Don an immersion suit in 60 seconds or less; and
- d. Perform various water survival skills (i.e., boarding a life raft and cold water survival introduced during safety training).

Character Disposition -

Candidates must be able to work independently, while following technical instructions.

Candidates must be able to get along with others.

Observers must maintain objectivity, and the appearance of objectivity. Observers must not have either direct or indirect financial or political interest in an organization that might be aided by the performance or non-performance of an observer's duties.

Observers must have the capability and aptitude to conduct the required protected species (marine mammal and sea turtle) sampling.

Citizenship -

Candidates must be a U.S. citizen, or a non-citizen who has legally resided in the United States continuously for at least the past 2 years.