



August 7, 2020

Redeploying Northeast Observers and At-Sea Monitors - August 14, 2020

On July 30, NOAA Fisheries announced that on August 13, the waiver of fishery monitoring will expire, and we will begin deploying observers and at-sea monitors on vessels fishing in Northeast fisheries starting **August 14**.

Beginning August 14, we will follow the sea day schedule and coverage targets laid out for the 2020 fishing year. Observers and at-sea monitors will be deployed to vessels using the Pre-Trip Notification System (PTNS), scallop Interactive Voice Response system (IVR), and port intercepts. Coverage targets are not expected to increase beyond those scheduled. We will not make up for unused days during the waiver period. Vessels with Electronic Monitoring will, temporarily, not be assigned observers or at-sea monitors after the waiver lifts. The full sea day schedule can be viewed on this page in your web browser at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/data/annual-discard-reports-northeast>.

We encourage fishing businesses to reach out to the observer provider companies or the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Fisheries Sampling Branch staff with any questions or concerns about redeployment. See contact information at the end of this letter.

Preparing for Redeployment

During the waiver period, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Fisheries Sampling Branch (FSB) worked on internal protocols and processes to ensure shoreside components of the program can operate. We have also coordinated with observer providers to develop redeployment plans that support the health and safety of observers, fishermen, and others in the fishing industry, in light of the COVID-19 virus. A summary of those activities follows.

NOAA Fisheries

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Fisheries Sampling Branch developed a comprehensive plan for resuming operations that supports fishery monitoring, with safety at its core. This plan includes workplace operations, communications, training, and redeployment of observers and at-sea monitors. We will continue to assist the regional observer providers with their observer redeployment plans to support the safe and effective redeployment of observers in the region.

When deployment resumes, we have established national-level criteria for vessels to be waived from observer or at-sea monitor coverage. Going forward, observer or monitor coverage may be waived, for both full and partial-coverage fisheries, on a trip-specific basis if one of the following two criteria are met.

1. Observers or at-sea monitors are not available for deployment; or
2. The observer providers cannot meet the safety protocols imposed by a state on commercial fishing crews or by the vessel or vessel company on its crew. Within our limited authority, our efforts are intended to ensure observers and monitors are following the same safety protocols that fishermen are following.

For more information on this topic see a message from NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator, Chris Oliver, by visiting this site in your web browser at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/leadership-message/noaa-fisheries-identifies-national-level-observer-waiver-criteria-will-begins-adapts-changing-circumstances-different-requirements-call-different>. Vessel operators should communicate directly with the observer service provider to establish whether they meet the criteria to obtain a waiver. All reporting and pre-trip notification call-in requirements remain in place regardless of waiver status.

Observer Providers

Each observer service provider has developed a redeployment plan that includes safety protocols and requirements. We are closely coordinating our actions with these companies and are encouraging them to use common core practices, including:

- Training observers on COVID-19 awareness and risk mitigation.
- Deploying individuals to the same vessel(s) and ports as much as possible.
- Minimizing observer travel among vessels, ports, and states.
- Pre- and post-trip health screening for observers.

- 14-day shelter in place prior to first deployment.
- Personal protective equipment requirements and provisioning.
- Temperature monitoring prior to and throughout deployment.
- Protocols for detecting, reporting, and acting on COVID-19 symptoms at home and at sea.

Redeployment plans are available from the providers upon request or can be found on their websites:

AIS Plan: <https://aisobservers.com/nefsc-observer-deployment-operations-plan/>

EWTS Plan: <http://ewts.com/COVID.19.pdf>

Fathoms Plan: http://fathomresources.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Fathom-Resources_COVID_19_-_Deployment-Plan.-7-15-20.pdf

Providers are also testing observers and at-sea monitors for COVID-19 prior to their initial deployment and then as testing sites are available and necessary.

Service provider staff or the observer plan to conduct a pre-trip vessel health check prior to sailing. The captain or vessel representative will be asked about the following:

- COVID-19 prevention protocol compliance between trips by the captain and crew.
- Current status of COVID-19 symptoms experienced by the captain and crew.
- Current status of COVID-19 positive test results or exposure to a person who has tested positive among captain and crew.
- Onboard procedures to reduce exposure to COVID-19.
- Response plan should someone display symptoms of COVID-19 during a trip.
- Onboard supply of personal protection and sanitizing equipment for captain and crew.

Observers

As observers get back to work, the number one priority is to mitigate the risk of contracting and spreading the virus. Observers are subject to their local guidance, provider redeployment plans, and FSB's redeployment plan, in addition to the vessel's COVID-19 mitigation plans.

Next Steps

We will continue to monitor local and state public health notifications, as well as the CDC for updates. Should our observer and at-sea monitor redeployments change, we will announce those changes as quickly and clearly as possible. We appreciate everyone's help with resuming fishery monitoring. To help ensure we are addressing industry concerns with the observer redeployment, a webinar will be held on August 12 starting at 2:30 pm via Webex meeting number 199 877 3626, password j6hJrDp7dA5 or direct link at <https://noaanmfs-meets.webex.com/noaanmfs-meets/j.php?MTID=m881c1d6702abf9a3519c364566ce6b7f> or by phone at +1-415-527-5035, Access code 199 877 3626. Feedback at the end of the webinar is welcome.

Sincerely,



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