

Frequently Asked Questions

Southeast Fisheries Science Center Observer Program

1. How are vessels selected?

Vessels are randomly selected from a pool of vessels that have catch history from previous years within the month range of the selected period. For example, vessels in the pool for the first quarter have reported landings between January and March in past years.

2. How often can a vessel be selected?

Vessels can be selected multiple times a year.

3. How is the data collected used?

Data collected from the observer program is used in stock assessments (i.e. estimate bycatch) as well as a host of other projects that are requested from academia, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations.

4. How do I comply with the program?

When selected, fishers are required to notify the program at least 48 hours before leaving on any commercial trip intended to land catch with the selected Federal commercial permit.

5. What happens if I choose to not carry an observer?

50 C.F.R. § 622.178, 635.7, 622.204, 622.27, and 622.52 states that when a vessel is selected, it must carry an observer and that permit renewal is contingent upon compliance with the observer program requirements. Otherwise, a fisher could undergo loss of permit or enforcement action.

6. What safety equipment must I have onboard?

The vessel must have a valid USCG safety decal and all required safety equipment must be present, in date, and stowed properly. Additionally, the life raft must have capacity for all persons on board, including the observer. Visit www.dco.uscg.mil to learn more about safety requirements and to schedule a dockside exam.

7. Does the observer need a bunk?

50 C.F.R. § 622.178, 635.7, 622.204, 622.27, and 622.52 states that observers must be provided equal accommodations. If the majority of crew on board has a bunk then yes, the observer must be provided with a bunk.

8. Do I need to provide food for the observer?

50 C.F.R. § 622.178, 635.7, 622.204, 622.27, and 622.52 states that observers must be provided food equivalent to that provided to the crew.

9. Will I get paid to carry an observer?

No. However, the observer program will reimburse the vessel for reasonable food cost. On average it takes 2 weeks for permit holders to be reimbursed.

10. What information will the observer collect?

Observers record gear characteristics, fishing effort, catch and bycatch information, and protected resource interactions.

11. Will observers collect coordinates?

Yes. 50 C.F.R. § 622.178, 635.7, 622.204, 622.27, and 622.52 states that observers must be allowed access to the vessel's navigation equipment, charts, and plotters to determine the vessel's position. Data collected is subject to confidentiality provisions in the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act at 16 U.S.C. § 1881a(b).