

Northeast Fisheries

At-Sea Monitoring Program (ASM)

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Fisheries Sampling Branch manages the At-Sea Monitoring Program (ASM). They oversee the at-sea monitoring service provider companies, provide training and certification, perform data quality assessments, process pre-trip notifications and manage vessel selections. ASM monitors play a vital role in the management of the Northeast Multispecies groundfish fishery.

Roles and Responsibilities

At-sea monitors collect scientific, management, compliance, and other fisheries data on board commercial fishing vessels. Information is collected through interviews with vessel captains and crew, observations of fishing operations, photographing catch, and measurements of selected portions of the catch and fishing gear. At-sea monitoring requirements are detailed under Amendment 16 to the NE Multispecies Fishery Management Plan and were first implemented on May 1st, 2010. At-sea monitoring coverage is an integral part of catch monitoring. It ensures that annual catch limits are not exceeded. At-sea monitors collect accurate information on catch composition and the data are used to estimate total discards by sectors, gear type, and stock area. For FY18, the NEFOP and ASM combined target coverage rate for groundfish vessels is 15%.

Duties of an At-Sea Monitor

At-sea monitors are deployed on vessels participating in the groundfish fishery in the Northeast (generally Maine through New York) for the duration of a trip (approximately one to fourteen days in length). Trip and fisheries data are collected electronically on a hand held computer. A rigorous sampling protocol is followed to collect weights of fish catch (kept and discarded) and to measure the lengths of certain fish. Interactions with protected species (marine mammals, sea turtles, and birds) are documented and detailed. Information on trip costs, gear type, and tow locations are also collected.

Minimum Qualifications

Education – unless waived, at-sea monitors must have: 1) a high school diploma, 2) at least one class in math or statistics, and 3) experience with computers.

Physical – must be able to work for extended periods of time at sea, sharing common facilities in close quarters. Monitors must be able to lift and/or drag heavy objects, climb ladders, tolerate stress, work long hours, and live in confined spaces.

Citizenship – must be a U.S. citizen, or a non-citizen who has a green card, TN authorization, H1 visa, or valid work visa, and a social security card.

Requirements – must hold a current certification for CPR and First Aid. They must successfully pass an at-sea monitoring certification course administered by the FSB and receive a medical clearance from their doctor stating they are fit for sea duty.

Conflict of Interest – must not have any direct or indirect interest in a fishery managed under federal regulations, including, but not limited to, vessels, dealers, shipping companies, sectors, sector managers, or advocacy groups.

How will I be notified to carry a monitor?

Fishermen and fishing industry representatives will be notified via the Pre-Trip Notification System (PTNS) no less than 24 hours in advance of their PTNS notified sail date that At-sea monitoring coverage will be required on that trip.

What are my responsibilities when carrying a monitor?

- Provide the monitor with living quarters, meals, and amenities comparable to a crew member
- Allow the monitor access to areas of the vessel and gear necessary to conduct their duties
- Allow the monitor access to communication equipment and view of navigation equipment as necessary to perform their duties
- Allow the monitor to sample, retain & store marine mammal, other protected species and/or target and non-target species specimens
- Provide true vessel locations by latitude and longitude upon request by the monitor
- Provide the monitor with VTR serial numbers
- Notify the monitor when commercial fishing operations are to begin and end
- Allow for the safe embarking & disembarking of the monitor

What are the vessel safety requirements I must meet to carry a monitor?

At-sea monitors are required to review emergency instructions with the vessel operator and complete a pre-trip safety check of the vessel's emergency equipment prior to departing on a trip (monitors arrive early to conduct the pre-trip safety checklist). Monitors will verify that the equipment, registrations and certificates meet the requirements.

- All vessels MUST have a current U.S. Coast Guard Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examination decal, a monitor may not depart on a trip selected for coverage until the decal is up to date
- Personal flotation devices/immersion suits for all crew onboard (monitors provide their own suit & PFD)
- Ring buoys or other approved flotation
- Distress signals/flares
- Fire extinguishing equipment
- EPIRB registered to vessel with current NOAA SARSAT registration, battery, and hydrostatic release
- Survival craft with sufficient capacity to accommodate the total number of crew onboard including the monitor