



NOAA FISHERIES

Northeast Fisheries Science Center



Late Observer Policy for Fishermen

This policy provides guidance on what to do if an observer is not present at the time and location provided by the vessel in its pre-trip notification.

The Northeast Fisheries Observer Program does not accept observers, at-sea monitors, dockside monitors, or portside samplers (hereafter referred to as ‘observers’) being late for a scheduled trip, so it should be a rare occurrence that an observer is late for a trip. Observers should not delay scheduled fishing operations. Observers with unacceptable reasons for being late will be put on probation, which may result in decertification.

This late observer policy relies on the following communication protocol.

Clear trip information is relayed directly from the captain to the observer, including:

- Sail date and time (specify AM or PM) and expected trip length, if traditional at-sea coverage.
 - If coverage is for landings sampling, landing date and time needs to be communicated.
- Expected trip length.
- Location the vessel is tied or moored.
- A current contact phone number for the captain

When a multiday trip is delayed, observers should be provided with advance notice once a new sail date and time is established, so that they may prepare for the trip and travel to the vessel.

As trip details may change due to weather and other unpredictable variables, it is critical that all parties clearly communicate trip details. Information provided via the Pre-Trip Notification System (PTNS), such as time of departure, is meant to be the best estimation at the time of the notification. If trip details change from what was submitted in the PTNS or originally discussed when coordinating coverage in a non-notification fishery, the final trip information must be conveyed to the observer assigned to the trip by establishing contact with the provider/observer before the vessel sails. Vessels providing false information in the PTNS or to the observer will be referred to the Office of Law Enforcement.

Observer Service Provider Program Manager Contacts

A.I.S., Inc. – 774-762-9001

East West Technical Services – 860-910-4957

Fathom Resources – 508-990-0997

New England Marine Monitoring – 207-370-9791

It is strongly recommended to observers that they arrive one hour prior to the scheduled sail time to allow sufficient time for locating the vessel, unloading sampling gear, and parking. When the captain (or their designee) is present, the observer may board the vessel, find a secure area for their gear, and start the pre-trip safety check.

For trips with a pre-trip notification requirement

Should the observer fail to arrive at the vessel at the scheduled sail time, it is recommended that the vessel captain call the observer provider at the phone number listed above to ensure that the proper trip information was communicated. These contact numbers are also provided in the PTNS email a vessel receives when an observer has been assigned to their trip.

If a captain is unsure if their trip has an observer assigned or was issued a waiver, they may check their selection status on the PTNS website, using their FishOnline username and password at <https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/>. Vessels are also welcome to call the fishery support lines to confirm details about a specific trip.

PTNS Line – available 24/7
1-855-347-4371 (1-855-FISHES1)

Once assigned an observer, a trip may not sail without an observer unless it has been issued a written or verbal waiver from the observer provider or Northeast Fisheries Observer Program staff. If an assigned observer is late, the vessel must call the assigned provider company and/or the PTNS line to obtain a waiver prior to sailing. Sailing without the assigned observer and without calling to receive a waiver may result in a trip refusal submitted to the Office of Law Enforcement.

When calling the PTNS line, identify the vessel name, permit number, the notification confirmation number, your name and number, and describe the reason for calling. The phone call will be logged, and if the call does not come in during business hours, the after-hours NMFS on-call staff will be contacted right away.