Northeast Fisheries Observer Program
Vessel Selection Information

In the Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic regions of the United States, there are several fisheries that require observer coverage. Vessel representatives from these fisheries notify the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program prior to each trip.

Observer coverage for these trips is accomplished through three categories of observers: Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP), At-Sea Monitors (ASM), and Industry Funded Scallop (IFS). For consistency, any reference to "observer" in this document refers to any observer or monitor working for NEFOP, ASM or IFS contracted providers.

Pre-Trip Notification System (PTNS): for multispecies groundfish and longfin squid
Vessels must notify for PTNS-eligible trips a minimum of 48 hours in advance of trip sail time. The PTNS phone line is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year so that fishermen may call in at their convenience.

When a trip notification is entered into the system, PTNS initiates an automated process that randomly selects trips based on the coverage rate of trips in the same stratum. A stratum is a unique combination of sector, gear, and fishing area. The random selection process applies to each trip as part of a stratum and does not take into account individual vessel information. After a trip is selected for possible coverage, providers are chosen randomly by the system based on the proportion of observers each provider employs. The selected provider(s) will receive an email containing only specific details about the trip: the type of coverage (NEFOP or ASM), the type of trip (day or multiday), the sail date and time, and the vessel's port. This is enough information for the provider to coordinate coverage without having vessel-identifying information. The selected provider determines if they have an observer available in that area for that time and either accepts the trip or declines coverage.

PTNS selects trips at a higher rate in a stratum when that stratum's system coverage is low and at a lower rate when that stratum's system coverage is high. Higher selection rates are evident at the start of the fishing year. This "front-loading" is intended to accomplish observer coverage on enough trips to calculate an observed discard rate as quickly as possible. This feature reduces the reliance on the previous year's data.

Day trips have a higher cancellation rate than multiday trips – for understandable reasons, like weather. Fewer trips and higher cancellation rates create fluctuations in stratum coverage rates within the system, especially at the beginning of the year. As more trips are taken in a stratum, coverage tends to even out to the target rates.

There are some non-random selection features as well. Vessels with a low coverage rate and those that frequently cancel trips that are assigned observers are identified by PTNS, and their trips are not selected randomly.

Notifying for a series of trips on a single day can cause a string of selections. For example, a vessel may notify for 7 single-day trips on Thursday, sailing the following Saturday-Friday. The system immediately evaluates the coverage achievements in comparison to the target and determines whether each trip is selected, and it is very likely that the selection result will be similar for all of those trips. So if coverage is needed in the stratum, then it is highly likely that most trips will be selected (and vice versa). We suggest breaking up the notifications (not entering all 7 days at once) to allow the system to refresh with recent incoming observed trips. As trips sail with observers, the providers input that data, and this is what "credits" the system with observed trips.

Please see the Pre-Trip Notification System Instructions for more information:
http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/fsb/ptns/PTNS_Instructions_Combo.pdf.

Notification System for Atlantic Herring
Atlantic herring vessel representatives notify NEFOP 48 or 72 hours in advance of a fishing trip, dependent on their permit category. NEFOP will issue waivers or selection notices for observer coverage weekly via the vessel's vessel monitoring system (VMS). Selection of vessels is representative of effort, and designed to achieve seadays allocated by fleet per quarter under the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM). More information about SBRM is found at: http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/fsb/SBRM/.

Notification System for Atlantic Mackerel
Representatives for Atlantic mackerel vessels that are issued a limited access permit (Tier 1, 2, or 3) must call NEFOP at least 48 hours in advance of a fishing trip. NEFOP will issue waivers or selection notices for observer coverage weekly via the vessel's VMS. Selection of vessels is representative of effort, and designed to achieve seadays allocated by fleet per quarter under SBRM. More information about SBRM is found at: http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/fsb/SBRM/.

Notification System for Atlantic Sea Scallop
The IFS observer program utilizes an automated Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system to record information on a vessel's intent to fish for scallops. The system is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year so that fishermen may call in at their convenience prior to a trip. Limited Access vessels are required to call into the system on a per-trip basis, and Limited Access General Category vessels are required to call once per fishing week (Sunday through Saturday), with each requiring 72 hours notice of intent to fish. Random selection of scallop trips occurs based on fleet, gear, and area fished and takes into account the vessel's previous observer coverage. Selection or waiver emails are sent by NEFOP via the vessel's VMS within 24 hours of notice of their intent to fish. If selected, fishermen are then required to contact observer provider companies to arrange observer coverage for their selected trip. If no observer provider company can provide an observer for the intended trip, the vessel representative may request a waiver from NEFOP.