

§660.140 Shorebased IFQ Program.

(h) *Observer requirements*—(1) *Observer coverage requirements*—(i) *Coverage*. The following observer coverage pertains to certified observers obtained from an observer provider permitted by NMFS.

(A) Any vessel participating in the Shorebased IFQ Program:

(1) Must carry a certified observer on any fishing trip from the time the vessel leaves port and until the completion of landing (until all catch from that fishing trip has been offloaded—see landing at §660.11 and 660.60(h)(2)).

(2) Must carry an observer at any time the vessel is underway in port, including transit between delivery points when fish is offloaded at more than one IFQ first receiver.

(3) Is exempt from the requirement to maintain observer coverage as specified in this paragraph (h) while remaining docked in port when the observer makes available to the catch monitor an Observer Program reporting form documenting the weight and number of any overfished species listed under a rebuilding plan at §660.40 retained during that trip and which documents any discrepancy the vessel operator and observer may have in the weights and number of the overfished species, unless modified inseason under routine management measures at §660.60(c)(1).

(4) Is exempt from the requirement to carry an observer if the vessel has a valid EM Authorization and is fishing with EM under §660.604 of subpart J.

(5) Is exempt from the requirement to maintain observer coverage as specified in this paragraph (h) while gear testing as defined in §660.11. The vessel operator must submit a valid declaration for gear/equipment testing, as required by §660.13(d)(4)(iv)(A), and must notify the Observer Program of the gear testing activity at least 48 hours prior to departing on a trip to test gear/equipment.

(B) Any vessel 125 ft (38.1 m) LOA or longer that is engaged in at-sea processing must carry two certified observers, and any vessel shorter than 125 ft (38.1 m) LOA that is engaged in at-sea processing must carry one certified observer, each day that the vessel is used to take, retain, receive, land, process, or transport groundfish.

(ii) *Observer deployment limitations and workload*. If an observer is unable to perform their duties for any reason, the vessel is required to be in port within 36 hours of the last haul sampled by the observer. An observer must not be deployed for more than 22 calendar days in a calendar month, except for when a waiver has been issued by the Observer Program. The Observer Program may issue waivers to the observer provider to allow observers to work more than 22 calendar days per month in the following circumstances:

(A) When it's anticipated that one trip will last over 20 days.

(B) When a replacement observer is not available due to injury or illness.

(C) When the Observer Program has predetermined that the extended deployment is not likely to result in data delays or otherwise impact the overall duties and obligations of the observer.

(iii) *Refusal to board.* Any boarding refusal on the part of the observer or vessel must be immediately reported to the Observer Program and OLE by the observer provider. The observer must be available for an interview with the Observer Program or OLE if necessary.

(2) *Vessel responsibilities.* As specified at §660.140(h)(1)(ii), if an observer is unable to perform their duties for any reason, the vessel is required to be in port within 36 hours of the last haul sampled by the observer. An operator and/or crew of a vessel required to carry an observer must provide:

(i) *Accommodations and food.* (A) Accommodations and food for trips less than 24 hours must be equivalent to those provided for the crew.

(B) Accommodations and food for trips of 24 hours or more must be equivalent to those provided for the crew and must include berthing space, a space that is intended to be used for sleeping and is provided with installed bunks and mattresses. A mattress or futon on the floor or a cot is not acceptable if a regular bunk is provided to any crew member, unless other arrangements are approved in advance by the Regional Administrator or designee.

(ii) *Safe conditions.* (A) Maintain safe conditions on the vessel for the protection of observers including adherence to all U.S. Coast Guard and other applicable rules, regulations, statutes, and guidelines pertaining to safe operation of the vessel, including, but not limited to rules of the road, vessel stability, emergency drills, emergency equipment, vessel maintenance, vessel general condition and port bar crossings. An observer may refuse boarding or reboarding a vessel and may request a vessel to return to port if operated in an unsafe manner or if unsafe conditions are identified.

(B) Have on board a valid Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Decal that certifies compliance with regulations found in 33 CFR chapter I and 46 CFR chapter I, a certificate of compliance issued pursuant to 46 CFR 28.710 or a valid certificate of inspection pursuant to 46 U.S.C. 3311. Maintain safe conditions on the vessel for the protection of observer(s) including adherence to all USCG and other applicable rules, regulations, or statutes pertaining to safe operation of the vessel, and provisions at §§600.725 and 600.746 of this chapter.

(iii) *Computer hardware and software.* [Reserved]

(iv) *Vessel position.* Allow observer(s) access to the vessel's navigation equipment and personnel, on request, to determine the vessel's position.

(v) *Access.* Allow observer(s) free and unobstructed access to the vessel's bridge, trawl or working deck, holding bins, sorting areas, cargo hold, and any other space that may be used to hold, process, weigh, or store fish at any time.

(vi) *Prior notification.* Notify observer(s) at least 15 minutes before fish are brought on board to allow sampling the catch.

(vii) *Records.* Allow observer(s) to inspect and copy any state or Federal logbook maintained voluntarily or as required by regulation.

(viii) [Reserved]

(ix) *Sampling station*. To allow the observer to carry out the required duties, the vessel owner must provide an observer sampling station that is:

(A) *Accessible*. The observer sampling station must be available to the observer at all times.

(B) *Limits hazards*. To the extent possible, the area should be free and clear of hazards including, but not limited to, moving fishing gear, stored fishing gear, inclement weather conditions, and open hatches.

(x) *Transfers at sea*. Transfers at-sea are prohibited.

(xi) *Housing on vessel in port*. During all periods an observer is housed on a vessel, the vessel operator must ensure that at least one crew member is aboard.

(3) *Procurement of observer services*. Owners of vessels required to carry observers under paragraph (h)(1) of this section must arrange for observer services from an observer provider, except that:

(i) Vessels are required to procure observer services directly from the Observer Program when NMFS has determined and given notification that the vessel must carry NMFS staff or an individual authorized by NMFS in lieu of an observer provided by an observer provider.

(ii) Vessels are required to procure observer services directly from the Observer Program and an observer provider when NMFS has determined and given notification that the vessel must carry NMFS staff and/or individuals authorized by NMFS, in addition to an observer provided by an observer provider.

(4) *Application to become an observer provider*. See §660.18.

(5) *Observer provider responsibilities*.

(i) *Provide qualified candidates to serve as observers*. Observer providers must provide qualified candidates to serve as observers. To be qualified, a candidate must have:

(A) A Bachelor's degree or higher from an accredited college or university with a major in one of the natural sciences;

(B) Successfully completed a minimum of 30 semester hours or equivalent in applicable biological sciences with extensive use of dichotomous keys in at least one course;

(C) Successfully completed at least one undergraduate course each in math and statistics with a minimum of 5 semester hours total for both; and

(D) Computer skills that enable the candidate to work competently with standard database software and computer hardware.

(ii) *Hiring an observer candidate*—(A) The observer provider must provide the candidate a copy of NMFS-provided pamphlets, information and other literature describing observer duties, for example, the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program's sampling

manual. Observer job information is available from the Observer Program Office's web site at <http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/research/divisions/fram/observer/index.cfm>.

(B) *Observer contracts.* The observer provider must have a written contract or a written contract addendum signed by the observer and observer provider prior to the observer's deployment with the following clauses:

(1) That the observer will return all phone calls, emails, text messages, or other forms of communication within the time specified by the Observer Program;

(2) That the observer inform the observer provider prior to the time of embarkation if he or she is experiencing any new mental illness or physical ailments or injury since submission of the physician's statement as required as a qualified observer candidate that would prevent him or her from performing their assigned duties; and

(3) That every observer successfully completes a Red Cross (or equivalent) basic cardiopulmonary resuscitation/first aid certification course prior to the end of the West Coast Groundfish Observer Training class.

(iii) *Ensure that observers complete duties in a timely manner.* An observer provider must ensure that observers employed by that observer provider do the following in a complete and timely manner:

(A) Submit to NMFS all data, logbooks and reports and biological samples as required under the observer program policy deadlines.

(B) Report for his or her scheduled debriefing and complete all debriefing responsibilities; and

(C) Return all sampling and safety gear to the Observer Program Office at the termination of their contract.

(D) Immediately report to the Observer Program Office and the OLE any refusal to board an assigned vessel.

(iv) *Observers provided to vessel.* (A) Must have a valid West Coast Groundfish observer certification with the required endorsements;

(B) Must not have informed the observer provider prior to the time of embarkation that he or she is experiencing a mental illness or a physical ailment or injury developed since submission of the physician's statement, as required in paragraph (h)(5)(xi)(B) of this section that would prevent him or her from performing his or her assigned duties; and

(C) Must have successfully completed all NMFS required training and briefing before deployment.

(v) *Respond to industry requests for observers.* An observer provider must provide an observer for deployment pursuant to the terms of the contractual relationship with the vessel to fulfill vessel requirements for observer coverage under paragraphs (h)(5)(xi)(D) of this section. An alternate observer must be supplied in each case where injury or illness prevents an observer from performing his or her duties or where an observer resigns prior to

completion of his or her duties. If the observer provider is unable to respond to an industry request for observer coverage from a vessel for whom the observer provider is in a contractual relationship due to the lack of available observers by the estimated embarking time of the vessel, the observer provider must report it to NMFS at least four hours prior to the vessel's estimated embarking time, unless the vessel provides less than four hour notice to the provider, in which case the provider is to notify NMFS as soon as practical after the situation arises.

(vi) *Provide observer salaries and benefits.* An observer provider must provide to its observer employees salaries and any other benefits and personnel services in accordance with the terms of each observer's contract.

(vii) *Provide observer deployment logistics.* (A) An observer provider must ensure each of its observers under contract:

(1) Has an individually assigned mobile or cell phones, in working order, for all necessary communication. An observer provider may alternatively compensate observers for the use of the observer's personal cell phone or pager for communications made in support of, or necessary for, the observer's duties.

(2) Has a check-in system in which the observer is required to contact the observer provider each time they depart and return to port on a vessels.

(3) Remains available to OLE and the Observer Program until the conclusion of debriefing.

(4) Receives all necessary transportation, including arrangements and logistics to the initial location of deployment, to all subsequent vessel assignments during that deployment, and to and from the location designated for an observer to be interviewed by the Observer Program; and

(5) Receives lodging, per diem, and any other services necessary to observers assigned to fishing vessels.

(i) An observer under contract may be housed on a vessel to which he or she is assigned: Prior to their vessel's initial departure from port; for a period not to exceed 24 hours following the completion of an offload when the observer has duties and is scheduled to disembark; or for a period not to exceed 24 hours following the vessel's arrival in port when the observer is scheduled to disembark.

(ii) Otherwise, each observer between vessels, while still under contract with an observer provider, shall be provided with accommodations in accordance with the contract between the observer and the observer provider. If the observer provider is responsible for providing accommodations under the contract with the observer, the accommodation must be at a licensed hotel, motel, bed and breakfast, or other shoreside accommodations that has an assigned bed for each observer that no other person may be assigned to for the duration of that observer's stay. Additionally, no more than four beds may be in any room housing observers at accommodations meeting the requirements of this section.

(viii) *Observer deployment limitations and workload.* (A) Not deploy an observer on the same vessel more than 90 calendar days in a 12-month period, unless otherwise authorized by NMFS.

(B) Not exceed observer deployment limitations and workload as outlined in paragraph (h)(1)(ii) of this section.

(ix) *Verify vessel's Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Decal.* An observer provider must ensure that the observer completes a current observer vessel safety checklist, and verify that a vessel has a valid USCG Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Decal as required under paragraph (h)(2)(ii)(B) of this section prior to the observer embarking on the first trip and before an observer may get underway aboard the vessel. The provider must submit all vessel safety checklists to the Observer Program, as specified by Observer Program. One of the following acceptable means of verification must be used to verify the decal validity:

(A) An employee of the observer provider, including the observer, visually inspects the decal aboard the vessel and confirms that the decal is valid according to the decal date of issuance; or

(B) The observer provider receives a hard copy of the USCG documentation of the decal issuance from the vessel owner or operator.

(x) *Maintain communications with observers.* An observer provider must have an employee responsible for observer activities on call 24 hours a day to handle emergencies involving observers or problems concerning observer logistics, whenever observers are at sea, in transit, or in port awaiting vessel reassignment.

(xi) *Maintain communications with the Observer Program Office.* An observer provider must provide all of the following information by electronic transmission (email), fax, or other method specified by NMFS.

(A) *Observer training, briefing, and debriefing registration materials.* This information must be submitted to the Observer Program Office at least 10 business days prior to the beginning of a scheduled West Coast groundfish observer certification training or briefing session. Submissions received less than 10 business days prior to a West Coast groundfish observer certification training or briefing session will be approved by the Observer Program on a case-by-case basis.

(1) Training registration materials consist of the following:

(i) Date of requested training;

(ii) A list of observer candidates that includes each candidate's full name (*i.e.*, first, middle and last names), date of birth, and gender;

(iii) A copy of each candidate's academic transcripts and resume;

(iv) A statement signed by the candidate under penalty of perjury which discloses the candidate's criminal convictions;

(v) Length of each observer's contract.

(2) Briefing registration materials consist of the following:

(i) Date and type of requested briefing session;

(ii) List of observers to attend the briefing session, that includes each observer's full name (first, middle, and last names);

(iii) Length of each observer's contract.

(3) *Debriefing.* The Observer Program will notify the observer provider which observers require debriefing and the specific time period the observer provider has to schedule a date, time, and location for debriefing. The observer provider must contact the Observer Program within 5 business days by telephone to schedule debriefings.

(i) Observer providers must immediately notify the observer program when observers end their contract earlier than anticipated.

(ii) [Reserved]

(B) *Physical examination.* A signed and dated statement from a licensed physician that he or she has physically examined an observer or observer candidate. The statement must confirm that, based on that physical examination, the observer or observer candidate does not have any health problems or conditions that would jeopardize that individual's safety or the safety of others while deployed, or prevent the observer or observer candidate from performing his or her duties satisfactorily. The statement must declare that, prior to the examination, the physician was made aware of the duties of the observer and the dangerous, remote, and rigorous nature of the work by reading the NMFS-prepared information. The physician's statement must be submitted to the Observer Program Office prior to certification of an observer. The physical exam must have occurred during the 12 months prior to the observer's or observer candidate's deployment. The physician's statement expires 12 months after the physical exam occurred and a new physical exam must be performed, and accompanying statement submitted, prior to any deployment occurring after the expiration of the statement.

(C) *Certificates of insurance.* Copies of "certificates of insurance," that name the Northwest Fisheries Science Center Observer Program manager as the "certificate holder," shall be submitted to the Observer Program Office by February 1 of each year. The certificates of insurance shall verify the following coverage provisions and state that the insurance company will notify the certificate holder if insurance coverage is changed or canceled.

(1) Maritime Liability to cover "seamen's" claims under the Merchant Marine Act (Jones Act) and General Maritime Law (\$1 million minimum).

(2) Coverage under the U.S. Longshore and Harbor Workers' Compensation Act (\$1 million minimum).

(3) States Worker's Compensation as required.

(4) Commercial General Liability.

(D) *Observer provider contracts.* If requested, observer providers must submit to the Observer Program Office a completed and unaltered copy of each type of signed and valid contract (including all attachments, appendices, addendums, and exhibits incorporated into the contract) between the observer provider and those entities requiring observer services under paragraph (h)(1)(i) of this section. Observer providers must also submit to the Observer Program Office, upon request, a completed and unaltered copy of the current or most recent signed and valid contract (including all attachments, appendices, addendums, and exhibits incorporated into the contract and any agreements or policies with regard to observer compensation or salary levels) between the observer provider and the particular entity identified by the Observer Program or with specific observers. The copies must be submitted to the Observer Program Office via email, fax, or mail within 5 business days of the request. Signed and valid contracts include the contracts an observer provider has with:

(1) Vessels required to have observer coverage as specified at paragraph (h)(1)(i) of this section; and

(2) Observers.

(E) *Change in observer provider management and contact information.* An observer provider must submit to the Observer Program Office any change of management or contact information as required at §660.18(h).

(F) *Biological samples.* The observer provider must ensure that biological samples are stored/handled properly prior to delivery/transport to NMFS.

(G) *Observer status report.* Observer providers must provide NMFS with an updated list of observer trips per Observer Program protocol. Trip information includes observer provider name, observer last name, observer first name, trip start date, trip end date, status of observer, vessel name, and vessel identification number.

(H) *Other information.* Observer providers must submit to NMFS, if requested, copies of any information developed and used by the observer providers distributed to vessels, such as informational pamphlets, payment notification, description of observer duties, etc.

(I) *Other reports.* Reports of the following must be submitted in writing to the Observer Program Office by the observer provider via fax or email address designated by the Observer Program Office within 24 hours after the observer provider becomes aware of the information:

(1) Any information regarding possible observer harassment;

(2) Any information regarding any action prohibited under §660.12(e); §660.112(a)(4); or §600.725(o), (t) and (u) of this chapter;

(3) Any concerns about vessel safety or marine casualty under 46 CFR 4.05-1(a)(1) through (7);

(4) Any observer illness or injury that prevents the observer from completing any of his or her duties described in the observer manual; and

(5) Any information, allegations or reports regarding observer conflict of interest or breach of the standards of behavior described in observer provider policy.

(xii) *Replace lost or damaged gear.* Lost or damaged gear issued to an observer by NMFS must be replaced by the observer provider. All replacements must be provided to NMFS and be in accordance with requirements and procedures identified in writing by the Observer Program Office.

(xiii) *Maintain confidentiality of information.* An observer provider must ensure that all records on individual observer performance received from NMFS under the routine use provision of the Privacy Act U.S.C. 552a or as otherwise required by law remain confidential and are not further released to any person outside the employ of the observer provider company to whom the observer was contracted except with written permission of the observer.

(xiv) *Limitations on conflict of interest.* Observer providers:

(A) Must not have a direct financial interest, other than the provision of observer, catch monitor or other biological sampling services, in any federal or state managed fisheries, including, but not limited to:

(1) Any ownership, mortgage holder, or other secured interest in a vessel or shoreside processor facility involved in the catching, taking, harvesting or processing of fish;

(2) Any business involved with selling supplies or services to any vessel or shoreside processors participating in a fishery managed pursuant to an FMP in the waters off the coasts of Alaska, California, Oregon, and Washington, or

(3) Any business involved with purchasing raw or processed products from any vessel or shoreside processor participating in a fishery managed pursuant to an FMP in the waters off the coasts of Alaska, California, Oregon, and Washington.

(B) Must assign observers without regard to any preference by representatives of vessels other than when an observer will be deployed.

(C) Must not solicit or accept, directly or indirectly, any gratuity, gift, favor, entertainment, loan, or anything of monetary value except for compensation for providing observer services from any person who conducts fishing or fish processing activities that are regulated by NMFS, or who has interests that may be substantially affected by the performance or non-performance of the official duties of observer providers.

(xv) *Observer conduct and behavior.* An observer provider must develop and maintain a policy addressing observer conduct and behavior for their employees that serve as observers.

(A) The policy shall address the following behavior and conduct regarding:

(1) Observer use of alcohol;

(2) Observer use, possession, or distribution of illegal drugs in violation of applicable law; and;

(3) Sexual contact with personnel of the vessel or processing facility to which the observer is assigned, or with any vessel or processing plant personnel who may be substantially affected by the performance or non-performance of the observer's official duties.

(B) An observer provider shall provide a copy of its conduct and behavior policy by February 1 of each year, to: observers, observer candidates and the Observer Program Office.

(xvi) *Refusal to deploy an observer.* Observer providers may refuse to deploy an observer on a requesting vessel if the observer provider has determined that the requesting vessel is inadequate or unsafe pursuant to those described at §600.746 or U.S. Coast Guard and other applicable rules, regulations, statutes, or guidelines pertaining to safe operation of the vessel.

(6) *Observer certification and responsibilities—(i) Applicability.* Observer certification authorizes an individual to fulfill duties as specified in writing by the Observer Program Office while under the employ of an observer provider and according to certification requirements as designated under paragraph (h)(6)(iii) of this section.

(ii) *Observer certification official.* The Regional Administrator will designate a NMFS observer certification official who will make decisions for the Observer Program Office on whether to issue or deny observer certification.

(iii) *Certification requirements—(A) Initial certification.* NMFS may certify individuals who, in addition to any other relevant considerations:

(1) Are employed by an permitted observer provider at the time of the of the certification is issued;

(2) Have provided, through their observer provider:

(i) Information identified by NMFS at §679.52 (b) of this chapter regarding an observer candidate's health and physical fitness for the job;

(ii) Meet all observer candidate education and health standards as specified in §679.52 (b) of this chapter; and

(iii) Have successfully completed NMFS-approved training as prescribed by the Observer Program. Successful completion of training by an observer applicant consists of meeting all attendance and conduct standards issued in writing at the start of training; meeting all performance standards issued in writing at the start of training for assignments, tests, and other evaluation tools; and completing all other training requirements established by the Observer Program.

(iv) Have not been decertified under paragraph (h)(6)(ix) of this section, or pursuant to §679.53(c) of this chapter.

(B) [Reserved]

(iv) *Denial of a certification.* The NMFS observer certification official will issue a written determination denying observer certification if the candidate fails to successfully complete training, or does not meet the qualifications for certification for any other relevant reason.

(v) *Issuance of an observer certification.* An observer certification may be issued upon determination by the observer certification official that the candidate has successfully met all requirements for certification as specified at paragraph (h)(6)(iii) of this section. The following endorsements as prescribed by the Observer Program must be obtained in addition to observer certification.

(A) *West Coast Groundfish Observer Program training endorsement.* A training endorsement signifies the successful completion of the training course required to obtain observer certification. This endorsement expires when the observer has not been deployed and performed sampling duties as required by the Observer Program Office for a period of time, specified by the Observer Program, after his or her most recent debriefing. The Observer can renew the endorsement by successfully completing training once more.

(B) *West Coast Groundfish Observer Program annual general endorsement.* Each observer must obtain an annual general endorsement to their certification prior to his or her first deployment within any calendar year subsequent to a year in which a training endorsement is obtained. To obtain an annual general endorsement, an observer must successfully complete the annual briefing, as specified by the Observer Program. All briefing attendance, performance, and conduct standards required by the Observer Program must be met.

(C) *West Coast Groundfish Observer Program deployment endorsement.* Each observer who has completed an initial deployment, as defined by the Observer Program, after receiving a training endorsement or annual general endorsement, must complete all applicable debriefing requirements specified by the Observer Program. A deployment endorsement is issued to observers who meet the performance standards specified by the Observer Program. A deployment endorsement must be obtained prior to any subsequent deployments for the remainder of that calendar year. If a deployment endorsement is not issued, certification training must be repeated.

(vi) *Maintaining the validity of an observer certification.* After initial issuance, an observer must keep their certification valid by meeting all of the following requirements specified below:

(A) Successfully perform their assigned duties as described in the observer manual or other written instructions from the Observer Program.

(B) Accurately record their sampling data, write complete reports, and report accurately any observations of suspected violations of regulations relevant to conservation of marine resources or their environment.

(C) Not disclose collected data and observations made on board the vessel or in the processing facility to any person except the owner or operator of the observed vessel or an authorized officer or NMFS.

(D) Successfully complete any required trainings or briefings as prescribed by the Observer Program.

(E) Successful completion of briefing by an observer applicant consists of meeting all attendance and conduct standards issued in writing at the start of training; meeting all performance standards issued in writing at the start of briefing for assignments, tests, and other evaluation tools; and completing all other briefing requirements established by the Observer Program.

(F) Hold a Red Cross (or equivalent) basic cardiopulmonary resuscitation/first aid certification.

(G) Successfully meet Observer Program performance standards reporting for assigned debriefings or interviews.

(H) Submit all data and information required by the Observer Program within the program's stated guidelines.

(I) Meet the minimum annual deployment period of 45 days every 12 months. On a case-by case basis, the Observer Program may consider waiving the 45 day requirement.

(vii) *Limitations on conflict of interest.* Observers:

(A) Must not have a direct financial interest, other than the provision of observer services or catch monitor services, in a North Pacific fishery managed pursuant to an FMP for the waters off the coast of Alaska, Alaska state waters, or in a Pacific Coast fishery managed by either the state or Federal Governments in waters off Washington, Oregon, or California, including but not limited to:

(1) Any ownership, mortgage holder, or other secured interest in a vessel, shore-based or floating stationary processor facility involved in the catching, taking, harvesting or processing of fish,

(2) Any business involved with selling supplies or services to any vessel, shore-based or floating stationary processing facility; or

(3) Any business involved with purchasing raw or processed products from any vessel, shore-based or floating stationary processing facilities.

(B) Must not solicit or accept, directly or indirectly, any gratuity, gift, favor, entertainment, loan, or anything of monetary value from any person who either conducts activities that are regulated by NMFS in the Pacific coast or North Pacific regions or has interests that may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the observers' official duties.

(C) May not serve as observers on any vessel or at any shore-based or floating stationary processor owned or operated by a person who employed the observer in the last two years.

(D) May not solicit or accept employment as a crew member or an employee of a vessel or shore-based or floating stationary processor while employed by an observer provider.

(E) Provisions for remuneration of observers under this section do not constitute a conflict of interest.

(viii) *Standards of behavior.* Observers must:

(A) Perform their duties as described in the observer manual or other written instructions from the Observer Program Office.

(B) Accurately record their sampling data, write complete reports, and report accurately any observations of suspected violations of regulations relevant to the conservation of marine resources of their environment.

(C) Not disclose collected data and observations made on board the vessel to any person except the owner or operator of the observed vessel, an authorized officer, or NMFS.

(ix) *Suspension and decertification*—(A) *Suspension and decertification review official.* The Regional Administrator (or a designee) will designate an observer suspension and decertification review official(s), who will have the authority to review observer certifications and issue IAD of observer certification suspension and/or decertification.

(B) *Causes for suspension or decertification.* In addition to any other supported basis connected to an observer's job performance, the suspension and decertification official may initiate suspension or decertification proceedings against an observer:

(1) When it is alleged that the observer has not met applicable standards, including any of the following:

(i) Failed to satisfactorily perform duties as described or directed by the Observer Program; or

(ii) Failed to abide by the standards of conduct for observers, including conflicts of interest;

(2) Upon conviction of a crime or upon entry of a civil judgment for:

(i) Commission of fraud or other violation in connection with obtaining or attempting to obtain certification, or in performing the duties as specified in writing by the NMFS Observer Program;

(ii) Commission of embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification or destruction of records, making false statements, or receiving stolen property;

(iii) Commission of any other offense indicating a lack of integrity or honesty that seriously and directly affects the fitness of observers.

(C) *Issuance of an IAD.* Upon determination that suspension or decertification is warranted, the suspension/decertification official will issue a written IAD to the observer via certified mail at the observer's most current address provided to NMFS. The IAD will identify whether a certification is suspended or revoked and will identify the specific reasons for the action taken. Decertification is effective 30 calendar days after the date on the IAD, unless there is an appeal.

(D) *Appeals*. A certified observer who receives an IAD that suspends or revokes his or her observer certification may appeal the determination within 30 calendar days after the date on the IAD to the Office of Administrative Appeals pursuant to §660.19.

§660.150 Mothership (MS) Coop Program.

(j) *Observer requirements*—(1) *Observer coverage requirements*—(i) *Coverage*. The following observer coverage pertains to certified observers obtained from an observer provider permitted by NMFS.

(A) *MS vessels*. Any vessel registered to an MS permit 125 ft (38.1 m) LOA or longer must carry two certified observers, and any vessel registered to an MS permit shorter than 125 ft (38.1 m) LOA must carry one certified observer, each day that the vessel is used to take, retain, receive, land, process, or transport groundfish.

(B) *Catcher vessels*. Any vessel delivering catch to any MS vessel must carry one certified observer each day that the vessel is used to take groundfish, unless the catcher vessel has a valid EM Authorization and is fishing with EM under §660.604 of subpart J.

(C) *Gear testing exemption*. Vessels are exempt from the requirement to maintain observer coverage as specified in this paragraph (j) while gear testing as defined at §660.11. The vessel operator must submit a valid declaration for gear/equipment testing, as required by §660.13(d)(4)(iv)(A), and must notify the Observer Program of the gear testing activity at least 48 hours prior to departing on a trip to test gear/equipment.

(ii) *Observer workload*—(A) *MS vessels*. The time required for the observer to complete sampling duties must not exceed 12 consecutive hours in each 24-hour period.

(B) *Catcher vessels*. If an observer is unable to perform their duties for any reason, the vessel is required to be in port within 36 hours of the last haul sampled by the observer.

(iii) *Refusal to board*. Any boarding refusal on the part of the observer or vessel must be reported to the Observer Program and OLE by the observer provider. The observer must be available for an interview with the Observer Program or OLE if necessary.

(2) *Vessel responsibilities*. An operator and/or crew of a vessel required to carry an observer must provide:

(i) *Accommodations and food*—(A) *MS vessels*. Provide accommodations and food that are equivalent to those provided for officers, engineers, foremen, deck-bosses or other management level personnel of the vessel.

(B) *Catcher vessels*—(1) Accommodations and food for trips less than 24 hours must be equivalent to those provided for the crew.

(2) Accommodations and food for trips of 24 hours or more must be equivalent to those provided for the crew and must include berthing space, a space that is intended to be used for sleeping and is provided with installed bunks and mattresses. A mattress or futon on the floor or a cot is not acceptable if a regular bunk is provided to any crew member, unless other arrangements are approved in advance by the Regional Administrator or designee.

(ii) *Safe conditions*. MS vessels and catcher vessels must:

(A) Maintain safe conditions on the vessel for the protection of observers including adherence to all U.S. Coast Guard and other applicable rules, regulations, or statutes

pertaining to safe operation of the vessel including, but not limited to, rules of the road, vessel stability, emergency drills, emergency equipment, vessel maintenance, vessel general condition, and port bar crossings. An observer may refuse boarding or reboarding a vessel and may request a vessel return to port if operated in an unsafe manner or if unsafe conditions are indentified.

(B) Have on board a valid Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Decal that certifies compliance with regulations found in 33 CFR chapter I and 46 CFR chapter I, a certificate of compliance issued pursuant to 46 CFR 28.710 or a valid certificate of inspection pursuant to 46 U.S.C. 3311. Maintain safe conditions on the vessel for the protection of observer(s) including adherence to all USCG and other applicable rules, regulations, or statutes pertaining to safe operation of the vessel, and provisions at §§600.725 and 600.746 of this chapter.

(iii) *Computer hardware and software.* MS vessels must:

(A) Provide hardware and software pursuant to regulations at §679.51(e)(iii)(B) of this chapter.

(B) Provide the observer(s) access to a computer required under paragraph (j)(2)(iii)(A) of this section, and that is connected to a communication device that provides a point-to-point connection to the NMFS host computer.

(C) Ensure that the MS vessel has installed the most recent release of NMFS data entry software or other approved software prior to the vessel receiving, catching or processing IFQ species.

(D) Ensure that the communication equipment required in paragraph (j)(2)(iii) of this section and that is used by observers to enter and transmit data, is fully functional and operational. "Functional" means that all the tasks and components of the NMFS supplied, or other approved, software described at paragraph (j)(2)(iii) of this section and the data transmissions to NMFS can be executed effectively aboard the vessel by the communications equipment.

(iv) *Vessel position.* Allow observer(s) access to the vessel's navigation equipment and personnel, on request, to determine the vessel's position.

(v) *Access.* Allow observer(s) free and unobstructed access to the vessel's bridge, trawl or working decks, holding bins, processing areas, freezer spaces, weight scales, cargo holds, and any other space that may be used to hold, process, weigh, or store fish or fish products at any time.

(vi) *Prior notification.* Notify observer(s) at least 15 minutes before fish are brought on board, or fish and fish products are transferred from the vessel, to allow sampling the catch or observing the transfer.

(vii) *Records.* Allow observer(s) to inspect and copy any state or Federal logbook maintained voluntarily or as required by regulation.

(viii) *Assistance.* Provide all other reasonable assistance to enable observer(s) to carry out their duties, including, but not limited to:

- (A) Measuring decks, codends, and holding bins.
- (B) Providing the observer(s) with a safe work area.
- (C) Collecting samples of catch.
- (D) Collecting and carrying baskets of fish.
- (E) Allowing the observer(s) to collect biological data and samples.
- (F) Providing adequate space for storage of biological samples.

(ix) *Sample station and operational requirements.*

(A) *MS vessels.* To allow the observer to carry out required duties, the vessel owner must provide an observer sampling station that meets the following requirements:

(1) *Accessibility.* The observer sampling station must be available to the observer at all times.

(2) *Location.* The observer sampling station must be located within 4 m of the location from which the observer samples unsorted catch.

(3) *Access.* Unobstructed passage must be provided between the observer sampling station and the location where the observer collects sample catch.

(4) *Minimum work space.* The observer must have a working area of at least 4.5 square meters, including the observer's sampling table, for sampling and storage of fish to be sampled. The observer must be able to stand upright and have a work area at least 0.9 m deep in the area in front of the table and scale.

(5) *Table.* The observer sampling station must include a table at least 0.6 m deep, 1.2 m wide and 0.9 m high and no more than 1.1 m high. The entire surface area of the table must be available for use by the observer. Any area for the observer sampling scale is in addition to the minimum space requirements for the table. The observer's sampling table must be secured to the floor or wall.

(6) *Diverter board.* The conveyor belt conveying unsorted catch must have a removable board ("diverter board") to allow all fish to be diverted from the belt directly into the observer's sampling baskets. The diverter board must be located downstream of the scale used to weigh total catch. At least 1 m of accessible belt space, located downstream of the scale used to weigh total catch, must be available for the observer's use when sampling.

(7) *Other requirements.* The sampling station must be in a well-drained area that includes floor grating (or other material that prevents slipping), lighting adequate for day or night sampling, and a hose that supplies fresh or sea water to the observer.

(8) *Observer sampling scale.* The observer sample station must include a NMFS-approved platform scale (pursuant to requirements at §679.28(j)(2)) with a capacity of at least 50 kg located within 1 m of the observer's sampling table. The scale must be mounted so that the weighing surface is no more than 0.7 m above the floor.

(B) *Catcher vessels*. To allow the observer to carry out the required duties, the vessel owner must provide an observer sampling station that is:

(1) *Accessible*. The observer sampling station must be available to the observer at all times.

(2) *Limits hazards*. To the extent possible, the area should be free and clear of hazards including, but not limited to, moving fishing gear, stored fishing gear, inclement weather conditions, and open hatches.

(x) *Transfer at sea*. Observers may be transferred at-sea between MS vessels, between MS vessels and C/P vessels, or between a MS vessel and a catcher vessel. Transfers at-sea between catcher vessels is prohibited. For transfers, both vessels must:

(A) Ensure that transfers of observers at sea via small boat under its own power are carried out during daylight hours, under safe conditions, and with the agreement of observers involved.

(B) Notify observers at least 3 hours before observers are transferred, such that the observers can finish any sampling work, collect personal belongings, equipment, and scientific samples.

(C) Provide a safe pilot ladder and conduct the transfer to ensure the safety of observers during transfers.

(D) Provide an experienced crew member to assist observers in the small boat in which any transfer is made.

(xi) *Housing on vessel in port*. During all periods an observer is housed on a vessel, the vessel operator must ensure that at least one crew member is aboard.

(3) *Procurement of observer services*—(i) *MS vessels*. Owners of vessels required to carry observers under paragraph (j)(1)(i) of this section must arrange for observer services from an observer provider, except that:

(A) Vessels are required to procure observer services directly from the Observer Program when NMFS has determined and given notification that the vessel must carry NMFS staff or an individual authorized by NMFS in lieu of an observer provided by an observer provider.

(B) Vessels are required to procure observer services directly from the Observer Program and an observer provider when NMFS has determined and given notification that the vessel must carry NMFS staff and/or individuals authorized by NMFS, in addition to an observer provided by an observer provider.

(ii) *Catcher vessels*. Owners of vessels required to carry observers under paragraph (j)(1)(i) of this section must arrange for observer services from an observer provider, except that:

(A) Vessels are required to procure observer services directly from the Observer Program when NMFS has determined and given notification that the vessel must carry

NMFS staff or an individual authorized by NMFS in lieu of an observer provided by an observer provider.

(B) Vessels are required to procure observer services directly from the Observer Program and an observer provider when NMFS has determined and given notification that the vessel must carry NMFS staff and/or individuals authorized by NMFS, in addition to an observer provided by an observer provider.

(4) *Observer provider responsibilities.* (i) Provide qualified candidates to serve as observers. Observer providers must provide qualified candidates to serve as observers. To be qualified, a candidate must have:

(A) A Bachelor's degree or higher from an accredited college or university with a major in one of the natural sciences;

(B) Successfully completed a minimum of 30 semester hours or equivalent in applicable biological sciences with extensive use of dichotomous keys in at least one course;

(C) Successfully completed at least one undergraduate course each in math and statistics with a minimum of 5 semester hours total for both; and

(D) Computer skills that enable the candidate to work competently with standard database software and computer hardware.

(ii) *Hiring an observer candidate—(A) MS vessels.* (1) The observer provider must provide the candidate a copy of NMFS-provided pamphlets, information and other literature describing observer duties (*i.e.* The At-Sea Hake Observer Program's Observer Manual) prior to hiring the candidate. Observer job information is available from the Observer Program Office's Web site at <http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/research/divisions/fram/observer/index.cfm>.

(2) The observer provider must have a written contract or a written contract addendum that is signed by the observer and observer provider prior to the observer's deployment with the following clauses:

(i) That the observer will return all phone calls, emails, text messages, or other forms of communication within the time specified by the Observer Program;

(ii) That the observer inform the observer provider prior to the time of embarkation if he or she is experiencing any new mental illness or physical ailments or injury since submission of the physician's statement as required as a qualified observer candidate that would prevent him or her from performing their assigned duties.

(B) *Catcher vessels.* (1) Provide the candidate a copy of NMFS-provided pamphlets, information and other literature describing observer duties, for example, the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program's sampling manual. Observer job information is available from the Observer Program Office's Web site at <http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/research/divisions/fram/observer/index.cfm>.

(2) The observer provider must have a written contract or a written contract addendum that is signed by the observer and observer provider prior to the observer's deployment with the following clauses:

(i) That the observer will return all phone calls, emails, text messages, or other forms of communication within the time specified by the Observer Program;

(ii) That the observer inform the observer provider prior to the time of embarkation if he or she is experiencing any new mental illness or physical ailments or injury since submission of the physician's statement as required as a qualified observer candidate that would prevent him or her from performing their assigned duties; and

(iii) That the observer successfully completes a Red Cross (or equivalent) basic cardiopulmonary resuscitation/first aid certification course prior to the end of the Observer Program Training class.

(iii) *Ensure that observers complete duties in a timely manner*—(A) *MS vessels*. An observer provider must ensure that observers employed by that observer provider do the following in a complete and timely manner:

(1) Submit to NMFS all data, logbooks, and reports as required by the observer manual;

(2) Report for his or her scheduled debriefing and complete all debriefing responsibilities;

(3) Return all sampling and safety gear to the Observer Program Office;

(4) Submit all biological samples from the observer's deployment by the completion of the electronic vessel and/or processor survey(s); and

(5) Immediately report to the Observer Program Office and the OLE any refusal to board an assigned vessel.

(B) *Catcher vessels*. An observer provider must ensure that observers employed by that observer provider do the following in a complete and timely manner:

(1) Submit to NMFS all data, logbooks, and reports and biological samples as required under the Observer Program policy deadlines;

(2) Report for his or her scheduled debriefing and complete all debriefing responsibilities;

(3) Return all sampling and safety gear to the Observer Program Office; and

(4) Immediately report to the Observer Program Office and the OLE any refusal to board an assigned vessel.

(iv) *Observers provided to vessel*—(A) *MS vessels*. Observers provided to MS vessels:

(1) Must have a valid North Pacific groundfish observer certification with required endorsements and an At-Sea Hake Observer Program endorsement;

(2) Must not have informed the observer provider prior to the time of embarkation that he or she is experiencing a mental illness or a physical ailment or injury developed since submission of the physician's statement that would prevent him or her from performing his or her assigned duties; and

(3) Must have successfully completed all NMFS required training and briefing before deployment.

(B) *Catcher vessels.* Observers provided to catcher vessels:

(1) Must have a valid West Coast Groundfish observer certification with the required endorsements;

(2) Must have not informed the observer provider prior to the time of embarkation that he or she is experiencing a mental illness or a physical ailment or injury developed since submission of the physician's statement (required in paragraph (j)(4)(xi)(B)(2) of this section) that would prevent him or her from performing his or her assigned duties; and,

(3) Must have successfully completed all NMFS required training and briefing before deployment.

(v) *Respond to industry requests for observers.* An observer provider must provide an observer for deployment pursuant to the terms of the contractual relationship with the vessel to fulfill vessel requirements for observer coverage specified at paragraph (j)(1)(i) of this section. An alternate observer must be supplied in each case where injury or illness prevents an observer from performing his or her duties or where the observer resigns prior to completion of his or her duties. If the observer provider is unable to respond to an industry request for observer coverage from a vessel for whom the observer provider is in a contractual relationship due to lack of available observers by the estimated embarking time of the vessel, the observer provider must report it to the Observer Program at least four hours prior to the vessel's estimated embarking time.

(vi) *Provide observer salaries and benefits.* An observer provider must provide to its observer employees salaries and any other benefits and personnel services in accordance with the terms of each observer's contract.

(vii) *Provide observer deployment logistics—(A) MS vessels.* An observer provider must provide to each of its observers under contract:

(1) All necessary transportation, including arrangements and logistics, to the initial location of deployment, to all subsequent vessel assignments during that deployment, and to and from the location designated for an observer to be interviewed by the Observer Program; and

(2) Lodging, per diem, and any other services necessary to observers assigned to fishing vessels.

(3) An observer under contract may be housed on a vessel to which he or she is assigned:

(i) Prior to their vessel's initial departure from port;

(ii) For a period not to exceed 24 hours following the completion of an offload when the observer has duties and is scheduled to disembark; or

(iii) For a period not to exceed 24 hours following the vessel's arrival in port when the observer is scheduled to disembark.

(iv) An observer under contract who is between vessel assignments must be provided with shoreside accommodations pursuant to the terms of the contract between the observer provider and the observers. If the observer provider is responsible for providing accommodations under the contract with the observer, the accommodations must be at a licensed hotel, motel, bed and breakfast, or other shoreside accommodations for the duration of each period between vessel or shoreside assignments. Such accommodations must include an assigned bed for each observer and no other person may be assigned that bed for the duration of that observer's stay. Additionally, no more than four beds may be in any room housing observers at accommodations meeting the requirements of this section.

(B) *Catcher vessels.* An observer provider must ensure each of its observers under contract:

(1) Has an individually assigned mobile or cell phones, in working order, for all necessary communication. An observer provider may alternatively compensate observers for the use of the observer's personal cell phone or pager for communications made in support of, or necessary for, the observer's duties.

(2) Has a check-in system in which the observer is required to contact the observer provider each time they depart and return to port on a vessel.

(3) Remains available to OLE and the Observer Program until the conclusion of debriefing.

(4) Receives all necessary transportation, including arrangements and logistics to the initial location of deployment, to all subsequent vessel assignments during that deployment, and to and from the location designated for an observer to be interviewed by the Observer Program; and

(5) Receives lodging, per diem, and any other services necessary to observers assigned to fishing vessels.

(i) An observer under contract may be housed on a vessel to which he or she is assigned: Prior to their vessel's initial departure from port; for a period not to exceed 24 hours following the completion of an offload when the observer has duties and is scheduled to disembark; or for a period not to exceed 24 hours following the vessel's arrival in port when the observer is scheduled to disembark.

(ii) Otherwise, each observer between vessels, while still under contract with an observer provider, shall be provided with accommodations in accordance with the contract between the observer and the observer provider. If the observer provider is responsible for providing accommodations under the contract with the observer, the accommodations must be at a licensed hotel, motel, bed and breakfast, or other shoreside accommodations that has an assigned bed for each observer that no other person may be assigned to for the

duration of that observer's stay. Additionally, no more than four beds may be in any room housing observers at accommodations meeting the requirements of this section.

(viii) *Observer deployment limitations*—(A) *MS vessels*. Unless alternative arrangements are approved by the Observer Program Office, an observer provider must not:

(1) Deploy an observer on the same vessel more than 90 days in a 12-month period;

(2) Deploy an observer for more than 90 days in a single deployment;

(3) Include more than four vessels assignments in a single deployment, or

(4) Disembark an observer from a vessel before that observer has completed his or her sampling or data transmission duties.

(B) *Catcher vessels*. Unless alternative arrangements are approved by the Observer Program Office, an observer provider must not deploy an observer on the same vessel more than 90 calendar days in a 12-month period.

(ix) *Verify vessel's Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Decal*. An observer provider must ensure that the observer completes an observer vessel safety checklist, and verify that a vessel has a valid USCG Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Decal as required under paragraph (j)(2)(ii)(B) of this section prior to the observer embarking on the first trip and before an observer may get underway aboard the vessel. The provider must submit all vessel safety checklists to the Observer Program, as specified by Observer Program policy. One of the following acceptable means of verification must be used to verify the decal validity:

(A) The observer provider or employee of the observer provider, including the observer, visually inspects the decal aboard the vessel and confirms that the decal is valid according to the decal date of issuance; or

(B) The observer provider receives a hard copy of the USCG documentation of the decal issuance from the vessel owner or operator.

(x) *Maintain communications with observers*. An observer provider must have an employee responsible for observer activities on call 24 hours a day to handle emergencies involving observers or problems concerning observer logistics, whenever observers are at sea, in transit, or in port awaiting vessel reassignment.

(xi) *Maintain communications with the Observer Program Office*. An observer provider must provide all of the following information by electronic transmission (email), fax, or other method specified by NMFS.

(A) *Motherships*—(1) *Training and briefing registration materials*. The observer provider must submit training and briefing registration materials to the Observer Program Office at least 5 business days prior to the beginning of a scheduled observer at-sea hake training or briefing session.

(i) *Registration materials.* Registration materials consist of the date of requested training or briefing with a list of observers including each observer's full name (*i.e.*, first, middle and last names).

(ii) *Projected observer assignments.* Prior to the observer's completion of the training or briefing session, the observer provider must submit to the Observer Program Office a statement of projected observer assignments that include the observer's name; vessel, gear type, and vessel/processor code; port of embarkation; and area of fishing.

(2) *Observer debriefing registration.* The observer provider must contact the At-Sea Hake Observer Program within 5 business days after the completion of an observer's deployment to schedule a date, time and location for debriefing. Observer debriefing registration information must be provided at the time of debriefing scheduling and must include the observer's name, cruise number, vessel name(s) and code(s), and requested debriefing date.

(3) *Observer provider contracts.* If requested, observer providers must submit to the Observer Program Office a completed and unaltered copy of each type of signed and valid contract (including all attachments, appendices, addendums, and exhibits incorporated into the contract) between the observer provider and those entities requiring observer services under paragraph (j)(1)(i) of this section. Observer providers must also submit to the Observer Program Office upon request, a completed and unaltered copy of the current or most recent signed and valid contract (including all attachments, appendices, addendums, and exhibits incorporated into the contract and any agreements or policies with regard to observer compensation or salary levels) between the observer provider and the particular entity identified by the Observer Program or with specific observers. The copies must be submitted to the Observer Program Office via fax or mail within 5 business days of the request. Signed and valid contracts include the contracts an observer provider has with:

(i) Vessels required to have observer coverage as specified at paragraph (j)(1)(i) of this section; and

(ii) Observers.

(4) *Change in observer provider management and contact information.* Observer providers must submit notification of any other change to provider contact information, including but not limited to, changes in contact name, phone number, email address, and address.

(5) *Other reports.* Reports of the following must be submitted in writing to the At-Sea Hake Observer Program Office by the observer provider via fax or email address designated by the Observer Program Office within 24 hours after the observer provider becomes aware of the information:

(i) Any information regarding possible observer harassment;

(ii) Any information regarding any action prohibited under §660.12(e); §660.112(a)(4); or §600.725(o), (t) and (u) of this chapter;

(iii) Any concerns about vessel safety or marine casualty under 46 CFR 4.05-1(a)(1) through (7);

(iv) Any observer illness or injury that prevents the observer from completing any of his or her duties described in the observer manual; and

(v) Any information, allegations or reports regarding observer conflict of interest or breach of the standards of behavior described in observer provider policy.

(B) *Catcher vessels.* An observer provider must provide all of the following information by electronic transmission (email), fax, or other method specified by NMFS.

(1) *Observer training, briefing, and debriefing registration materials.* This information must be submitted to the Observer Program Office at least 10 business days prior to the beginning of a scheduled West Coast groundfish observer certification training or briefing session. Submissions received less than 10 business days prior to a West Coast groundfish observer certification training or briefing session will be approved by the Observer Program on a case-by-case basis.

(i) Training registration materials consist of the following: Date of requested training; a list of observer candidates that includes each candidate's full name (*i.e.*, first, middle and last names), date of birth, and gender; a copy of each candidate's academic transcripts and resume; a statement signed by the candidate under penalty of perjury which discloses the candidate's criminal convictions; and length of observer contract.

(ii) Briefing registration materials consist of the following: Date and type of requested briefing session; list of observers to attend the briefing session, that includes each observer's full name (first, middle, and last names); and length of observer contract.

(iii) The Observer Program will notify the observer provider which observers require debriefing and the specific time period the observer provider has to schedule a date, time, and location for debriefing. The observer provider must contact the Observer Program within 5 business days by telephone to schedule debriefings. Observer providers must immediately notify the Observer Program when observers end their contract earlier than anticipated.

(2) *Physical examination.* A signed and dated statement from a licensed physician that he or she has physically examined an observer or observer candidate. The statement must confirm that, based on that physical examination, the observer or observer candidate does not have any health problems or conditions that would jeopardize that individual's safety or the safety of others while deployed, or prevent the observer or observer candidate from performing his or her duties satisfactorily. The statement must declare that, prior to the examination, the physician was made aware of the duties of the observer and the dangerous, remote, and rigorous nature of the work by reading the NMFS-prepared information. The physician's statement must be submitted to the Observer Program Office prior to certification of an observer. The physical exam must have occurred during the 12 months prior to the observer's or observer candidate's deployment. The physician's statement expires 12 months after the physical exam occurred and a new physical exam must be performed, and accompanying statement submitted, prior to any deployment occurring after the expiration of the statement.

(3) *Certificates of insurance.* Copies of "certificates of insurance," that names the Northwest Fisheries Science Center Observer Program manager as the "certificate holder," shall be submitted to the Observer Program Office by February 1 of each year. The certificates of insurance shall verify the following coverage provisions and state that the

insurance company will notify the certificate holder if insurance coverage is changed or canceled.

(i) Maritime Liability to cover "seamen's" claims under the Merchant Marine Act (Jones Act) and General Maritime Law (\$1 million minimum).

(ii) Coverage under the U.S. Longshore and Harbor Workers' Compensation Act (\$1 million minimum).

(iii) States Worker's Compensation as required.

(iv) Commercial General Liability.

(4) *Observer provider contracts.* If requested, observer providers must submit to the Observer Program Office a completed and unaltered copy of each type of signed and valid contract (including all attachments, appendices, addendums, and exhibits incorporated into the contract) between the observer provider and those entities requiring observer services under paragraph (j)(1)(i) of this section. Observer providers must also submit to the Observer Program Office upon request, a completed and unaltered copy of the current or most recent signed and valid contract (including all attachments, appendices, addendums, and exhibits incorporated into the contract and any agreements or policies with regard to observer compensation or salary levels) between the observer provider and the particular entity identified by the Observer Program or with specific observers. The copies must be submitted to the Observer Program Office via fax or mail within 5 business days of the request. Signed and valid contracts include the contracts an observer provider has with:

(i) Vessels required to have observer coverage as specified at paragraph (j)(1)(i) of this section; and

(ii) Observers.

(5) *Change in observer provider management and contact information.* An observer provider must submit to the Observer Program office any change of management or contact information as required at §660.18(f).

(6) *Biological samples.* The observer provider must ensure that biological samples are stored/handled properly prior to delivery/transport to NMFS.

(7) *Observer status report.* Observer providers must provide NMFS with an updated list of observer trip per Observer Program protocol. Trip information includes observer provider name, observer last name, observer first name, trip start date, trip end date, status of observer, vessel name, and vessel identification number.

(8) *Other information.* An observer provider must submit to NMFS, if requested, copies of any information developed and used by the observer providers distributed to vessels, such as informational pamphlets, payment notification, description of observer duties, etc.

(9) *Other reports.* Reports of the following must be submitted in writing to the Observer Program Office by the observer provider via fax or email address designated by the Observer Program Office within 24 hours after the observer provider becomes aware of the information:

(i) Any information regarding possible observer harassment;

(ii) Any information regarding any action prohibited under §660.12(e); §660.112(a)(4); or §600.725(o), (t) and (u) of this chapter;

(iii) Any concerns about vessel safety or marine casualty under 46 CFR 4.05-1(a)(1) through (7);

(iv) Any observer illness or injury that prevents the observer from completing any of his or her duties described in the observer manual; and

(v) Any information, allegations or reports regarding observer conflict of interest or breach of the standards of behavior described in observer provider policy.

(xii) *Replace lost or damaged gear.* Lost or damaged gear issued to an observer by NMFS must be replaced by the observer provider. All replacements must be provided to NMFS and be in accordance with requirements and procedures identified in writing by the Observer Program Office.

(xiii) *Maintain confidentiality of information.* An observer provider must ensure that all records on individual observer performance received from NMFS under the routine use provision of the Privacy Act under 5 U.S.C. 552a or as otherwise required by law remain confidential and are not further released to any person outside the employ of the observer provider company to whom the observer was contracted except with written permission of the observer.

(xiv) *Limitations on conflict of interest.* Observer providers must meet limitations on conflict of interest. Observer providers:

(A) Must not have a direct financial interest, other than the provision of observer, catch monitor or other biological sampling services, in any federal or state managed fisheries, including but not limited to:

(1) Any ownership, mortgage holder, or other secured interest in a vessel, or shoreside processor facility involved in the catching, taking, harvesting or processing of fish,

(2) Any business involved with selling supplies or services to any vessel or shoreside processors participating in a fishery managed pursuant to an FMP in the waters off the coasts of Alaska, California, Oregon, and Washington, or

(3) Any business involved with purchasing raw or processed products from any vessel or shoreside processor participating in a fishery managed pursuant to an FMP in the waters off the coasts of Alaska, California, Oregon, and Washington.

(B) Must assign observers without regard to any preference by representatives of vessels other than when an observer will be deployed.

(C) Must not solicit or accept, directly or indirectly, any gratuity, gift, favor, entertainment, loan, or anything of monetary value except for compensation for providing observer services from any person who conducts fishing or fish processing activities that are regulated by NMFS in the Pacific coast or North Pacific regions, or who has interests that

may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the official duties of observer providers.

(xv) *Observer conduct and behavior.* An observer provider must develop and maintain a policy addressing observer conduct and behavior for their employees that serve as observers. The policy shall address the following behavior and conduct regarding:

(A) Observer use of alcohol;

(B) Observer use, possession, or distribution of illegal drugs in violation of applicable law; and

(C) Sexual contact with personnel of the vessel or processing facility to which the observer is assigned, or with any vessel or processing plant personnel who may be substantially affected by the performance or non-performance of the observer's official duties.

(D) An observer provider shall provide a copy of its conduct and behavior policy by February 1 of each year, to: observers, observer candidates and the Observer Program Office.

(xvi) *Refusal to deploy an observer.* Observer providers may refuse to deploy an observer on a requesting vessel if the observer provider has determined that the requesting vessel is inadequate or unsafe pursuant to those regulations described at §600.746 of this chapter or U.S. Coast Guard and other applicable rules, regulations, statutes, or guidelines pertaining to safe operation of the vessel.

(5) *Observer certification and responsibilities—(i) Applicability.* Observer certification authorizes an individual to fulfill duties as specified in writing by the NMFS Observer Program Office while under the employ of a NMFS-permitted observer provider and according to certification endorsements as designated under paragraph (j)(6)(iii) of this section.

(ii) *Observer certification official.* The Regional Administrator will designate a NMFS observer certification official who will make decisions for the Observer Program Office on whether to issue or deny observer certifications and endorsements.

(iii) *Certification requirements—(A) Initial certification.* NMFS may certify individuals who, in addition to any other relevant considerations:

(1) Are employed by an observer provider company permitted pursuant to §660.16 at the time of the issuance of the certification;

(2) Have provided, through their observer provider:

(i) Information identified by NMFS at §679.52(b) of this chapter regarding an observer candidate's health and physical fitness for the job;

(ii) Meet all observer education and health standards as specified in §679.52(b) of this chapter; and

(iii) Have successfully completed NMFS-approved training as prescribed by the Observer Program. Successful completion of training by an observer applicant consists of meeting all attendance and conduct standards issued in writing at the start of training; meeting all performance standards issued in writing at the start of training for assignments, tests, and other evaluation tools; and completing all other training requirements established by the Observer Program.

(iv) Have not been decertified under paragraph (j)(5)(ix) of this section, or pursuant to §679.53(c) of this chapter.

(B) [Reserved]

(iv) *Denial of a certification.* The NMFS observer certification official will issue a written determination denying observer certification if the candidate fails to successfully complete training, or does not meet the qualifications for certification for any other relevant reason.

(v) *Issuance of an observer certification.* An observer certification will be issued upon determination by the observer certification official that the candidate has successfully met all requirements for certification as specified at paragraph (j)(6)(iii) of this section. The following endorsements must be obtained, in addition to observer certification, in order for an observer to deploy.

(A) *MS vessels—(1) North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program certification training endorsement.* A certification training endorsement signifies the successful completion of the training course required to obtain observer certification. This endorsement expires when the observer has not been deployed and performed sampling duties as required by the Observer Program Office for a period of time, specified by the Observer Program, after his or her most recent debriefing. The observer can renew the endorsement by successfully completing certification training once more.

(2) *North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program annual general endorsements.* Each observer must obtain an annual general endorsement to their certification prior to his or her first deployment within any calendar year subsequent to a year in which a certification training endorsement is obtained. To obtain an annual general endorsement, an observer must successfully complete the annual briefing, as specified by the Observer Program. All briefing attendance, performance, and conduct standards required by the Observer Program must be met.

(3) *North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program deployment endorsements.* Each observer who has completed an initial deployment after certification or annual briefing must receive a deployment endorsement to their certification prior to any subsequent deployments for the remainder of that year. An observer may obtain a deployment endorsement by successfully completing all pre-cruise briefing requirements. The type of briefing the observer must attend and successfully complete will be specified in writing by the Observer Program during the observer's most recent debriefing.

(4) *At-Sea Hake Observer Program endorsements.* A Pacific whiting fishery endorsement is required for purposes of performing observer duties aboard vessels that process groundfish at sea in the Pacific whiting fishery. A Pacific whiting fishery endorsement to an observer's certification may be obtained by meeting the following requirements:

(i) Have a valid North Pacific groundfish observer certification;

(ii) Receive an evaluation by NMFS for his or her most recent deployment that indicated that the observer's performance met Observer Program expectations for that deployment; successfully complete any required briefings as prescribed by the Observer Program; and comply with all of the other requirements of this section.

(B) *Catcher vessels.* The following endorsements as prescribed by the Observer Program must be obtained in addition to observer certification, in order for an observer to deploy.

(1) *West Coast Groundfish Observer Program training endorsement.* A training endorsement signifies the successful completion of the training course required to obtain observer certification. This endorsement expires when the observer has not been deployed and performed sampling duties as required by the Observer Program office for a period of time, specified by the Observer Program, after his or her most recent debriefing. The observer can renew the endorsement by successfully completing training once more.

(2) *West Coast Groundfish Observer Program annual general endorsement.* Each observer must obtain an annual general endorsement to their certification prior to his or her first deployment within any calendar year subsequent to a year in which a training certification endorsement is obtained. To obtain an annual general endorsement, an observer must successfully complete the annual briefing, as specified by the Observer Program. All briefing attendance, performance, and conduct standards required by the Observer Program must be met.

(3) *West Coast Groundfish Observer Program deployment endorsement.* Each observer who has completed an initial deployment, as defined by the Observer Program, after receiving a training endorsement or annual general endorsement, must complete all applicable debriefing requirements specified by the Observer Program. A deployment endorsement is issued to observers who meet the performance standards specified by the Observer Program. A deployment endorsement must be obtained prior to any subsequent deployments for the remainder of that calendar year. If a deployment endorsement is not issued, certification training must be repeated.

(vi) *Maintaining the validity of an observer certification.* After initial issuance, an observer must keep their certification valid by meeting all of the following requirements specified below:

(A) *MS vessels.* (1) Successfully perform their assigned duties as described in the observer manual or other written instructions from the Observer Program.

(2) Accurately record their sampling data, write complete reports, and report accurately any observations of suspected violations of regulations relevant to conservation of marine resources or their environment.

(3) Not disclose collected data and observations made on board the vessel or in the processing facility to any person except the owner or operator of the observed vessel or an authorized officer or NMFS.

(4) Successfully complete any required briefings as prescribed by the At-Sea Hake Observer Program.

(5) Successful completion of briefing by an observer applicant consists of meeting all attendance and conduct standards issued in writing at the start of training; meeting all performance standards issued in writing at the start of training for assignments, tests, and other evaluation tools; and completing all other briefing requirements established by the Observer Program.

(6) Successfully meet all debriefing expectations including meeting Observer Program performance standards reporting for assigned debriefings or interviews.

(7) Submit all data and information required by the Observer Program within the program's stated guidelines.

(B) *Catcher vessels.* After initial issuance, an observer must keep their certification valid by meeting all of the following requirements specified below:

(1) Successfully perform their assigned duties as described in the observer manual or other written instructions from the Observer Program.

(2) Accurately record their sampling data, write complete reports, and report accurately any observations of suspected violations of regulations relevant to conservation of marine resources or their environment.

(3) Not disclose collected data and observations made on board the vessel or in the processing facility to any person except the owner or operator of the observed vessel or an authorized officer or NMFS.

(4) Successfully complete any required trainings or briefings as prescribed by the Observer Program.

(5) Successful completion of briefing by an observer applicant consists of meeting all attendance and conduct standards issued in writing at the start of training; meeting all performance standards issued in writing at the start of training for assignments, tests, and other evaluation tools; and completing all other briefing requirements established by the Observer Program.

(6) Hold current a Red Cross (or equivalent) basic cardiopulmonary resuscitation/first aid certification.

(7) Successfully meet all expectations in all debriefings including reporting for assigned debriefings or interviews and meeting program standards.

(8) Submit all data and information required by the observer program within the program's stated guidelines.

(9) Meet the minimum annual deployment period of 45 days every 12 months. On a case-by case basis, the Observer Program may consider waiving the 45 day requirement.

(vii) *Limitations on conflict of interest.* Observers:

(A) Must not have a direct financial interest, other than the provision of observer services or catch monitor services, in a North Pacific fishery managed pursuant to an FMP for the waters off the coast of Alaska, Alaska state waters, or in a Pacific Coast fishery managed by either the state or Federal Governments in waters off Washington, Oregon, or California, including but not limited to:

(1) Any ownership, mortgage holder, or other secured interest in a vessel, shore-based or floating stationary processor facility involved in the catching, taking, harvesting or processing of fish,

(2) Any business involved with selling supplies or services to any vessel, shore-based or floating stationary processing facility; or

(3) Any business involved with purchasing raw or processed products from any vessel, shore-based or floating stationary processing facilities.

(B) Must not solicit or accept, directly or indirectly, any gratuity, gift, favor, entertainment, loan, or anything of monetary value from any person who either conducts activities that are regulated by NMFS in the Pacific coast or North Pacific regions or has interests that may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the observers' official duties.

(C) May not serve as observers on any vessel or at any shore-based or floating stationary processor owned or operated by a person who employed the observer in the last two years.

(D) May not solicit or accept employment as a crew member or an employee of a vessel or shore-based or floating stationary processor while employed by an observer provider.

(E) Provisions for remuneration of observers under this section do not constitute a conflict of interest.

(viii) *Standards of behavior.* Observers must:

(A) Perform their assigned duties as described in the observer manual or other written instructions from the Observer Program Office.

(B) Accurately record their sampling data, write complete reports, and report accurately any observations of suspected violations of regulations relevant to conservation of marine resources or their environment.

(C) Not disclose collected data and observations made on board the vessel to any person except the owner or operator of the observed vessel, an authorized officer, or NMFS.

(D) Not disclose collected data and observations made on board the vessel to any person except the owner or operator of the observed vessel, an authorized officer, or NMFS.

(ix) *Suspension and decertification*—(A) *Suspension and decertification review official.* The Regional Administrator (or a designee) will designate an observer suspension

and decertification review official(s), who will have the authority to review observer certifications and issue IADs of observer certification suspension and/or decertification.

(B) *Causes for suspension or decertification.* The suspension/decertification official may initiate suspension or decertification proceedings against an observer:

(1) When it is alleged that the observer has not met applicable standards, including any of the following:

(i) Failed to satisfactorily perform duties of observers as specified in writing by the NMFS Observer Program; or

(ii) Failed to abide by the standards of conduct for observers, including conflicts of interest;

(2) Upon conviction of a crime or upon entry of a civil judgment for:

(i) Commission of fraud or other violation in connection with obtaining or attempting to obtain certification, or in performing the duties as specified in writing by the NMFS Observer Program;

(ii) Commission of embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification or destruction of records, making false statements, or receiving stolen property;

(iii) Commission of any other offense indicating a lack of integrity or honesty that seriously and directly affects the fitness of observers.

(C) *Issuance of an IAD.* Upon determination that suspension or decertification is warranted, the suspension/decertification official will issue a written IAD to the observer via certified mail at the observer's most current address provided to NMFS. The IAD will identify whether a certification is suspended or revoked and will identify the specific reasons for the action taken. Decertification is effective 30 calendar days after the date on the IAD, unless there is an appeal.

(D) *Appeals.* A certified observer who receives an IAD that suspends or revokes his or her observer certification may appeal the determination within 30 calendar days after the date on the IAD to the Office of Administrative Appeals pursuant to §660.19.

[75 FR 60897, Oct. 1, 2010, as amended at 75 FR 78406, Dec. 15, 2010; 76 FR 27547, May 11, 2011; 76 FR 53838, Aug. 30, 2011; 76 FR 74744, Dec. 1, 2011; 77 FR 45512, Aug. 1, 2012; 77 FR 55157, Sept. 7, 2012; 78 FR 18896, Mar. 28, 2013; 78 FR 68772, Nov. 15, 2013; 78 FR 75282, Dec. 11, 2013; 80 FR 22290, Apr. 21, 2015; 81 FR 27011, May 5, 2016; 83 FR 762, Jan. 8, 2018; 83 FR 64004, Dec. 12, 2018; 84 FR 31160, June 28, 2019; 84 FR 68810, Dec. 17, 2019; 85 FR 37029, June 19, 2020; 85 FR 35601, June 11, 2020]

§660.160 Catcher/processor (C/P) Coop Program.

(g) *Observer requirements*—(1) *Observer coverage requirements*—(i) *Coverage*. The following observer coverage pertains to certified observers obtained from an observer provider permitted by NMFS. Any vessel registered to a C/P-endorsed limited entry trawl permit that is 125 ft (38.1 m) LOA or longer must carry two certified observers, and any vessel registered to a C/P-endorsed limited entry trawl permit that is shorter than 125 ft (38.1 m) LOA must carry one certified observer, each day that the vessel is used to take, retain, receive, land, process, or transport groundfish.

(ii) *Observer workload*. The time required for the observer to complete sampling duties must not exceed 12 consecutive hours in each 24-hour period.

(iii) *Refusal to board*. Any boarding refusal on the part of the observer or vessel must be reported to the Observer Program and OLE by the observer provider. The observer must be available for an interview with the Observer Program or OLE if necessary.

(iv) *Gear testing exemption*. Vessels exempt from the requirement to maintain observer coverage as specified in this paragraph (g) while gear testing as defined at §660.11. The vessel operator must submit a valid declaration for gear/equipment testing, as required by §660.13(d)(4)(iv)(A), and must notify the Observer Program of the gear testing activity at least 48 hours prior to departing on a trip to test gear/equipment.

(2) *Vessel responsibilities*. An operator and/or crew of a vessel required to carry an observer must provide:

(i) *Accommodations and food*. Provide accommodations and food that are equivalent to those provided for officers, engineers, foremen, deck-bosses or other management level personnel of the vessel.

(ii) *Safe conditions*—(A) Maintain safe conditions on the vessel for the protection of observers including adherence to all U.S. Coast Guard and other applicable rules, regulations, or statutes pertaining to safe operation of the vessel, including but not limited to, rules of the road, vessel stability, emergency drills, emergency equipment, vessel maintenance, vessel general condition, and port bar crossings. An observer may refuse boarding or reboarding a vessel and may request a vessel to return to port if operated in an unsafe manner or if unsafe conditions are identified.

(B) Have on board a valid Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Decal that certifies compliance with regulations found in 33 CFR chapter I and 46 CFR chapter I, a certificate of compliance issued pursuant to 46 CFR 28.710 or a valid certificate of inspection pursuant to 46 U.S.C. 3311. Maintain safe conditions on the vessel for the protection of observer(s) including adherence to all USCG and other applicable rules, regulations, or statutes pertaining to safe operation of the vessel, and provisions at §§600.725 and 600.746 of this chapter.

(iii) *Computer hardware and software*. C/P vessels must:

(A) Provide hardware and software pursuant to regulations at §679.51 (e)(iii)(B) of this chapter.

(B) Provide the observer(s) access to a computer required under paragraph (g)(2)(iii) of this section that is connected to a communication device that provides a point-to-point connection to the NMFS host computer.

(C) Ensure that the C/P vessel has installed the most recent release of NMFS data entry software, or other approved software prior to the vessel receiving, catching or processing IFQ species.

(D) Ensure that the communication equipment required in paragraph (g)(2)(iii) of this section and used by observers to enter and transmit data, is fully functional and operational. "Functional" means that all the tasks and components of the NMFS supplied, or other approved, software described at paragraph (g)(2)(iii) of this section and the data transmissions to NMFS can be executed effectively aboard the vessel by the communications equipment.

(iv) *Vessel position.* Allow observer(s) access to, the vessel's navigation equipment and personnel, on request, to determine the vessel's position.

(v) *Access.* Allow observer(s) free and unobstructed access to the vessel's bridge, trawl or working decks, holding bins, processing areas, freezer spaces, weight scales, cargo holds, and any other space that may be used to hold, process, weigh, or store fish or fish products at any time.

(vi) *Prior notification.* Notify observer(s) at least 15 minutes before fish are brought on board, or fish and fish products are transferred from the vessel, to allow sampling the catch or observing the transfer.

(vii) *Records.* Allow observer(s) to inspect and copy any State or Federal logbook maintained voluntarily or as required by regulation.

(viii) *Assistance.* Provide all other reasonable assistance to enable observer(s) to carry out their duties, including, but not limited to:

(A) Measuring decks, codends, and holding bins.

(B) Providing the observer(s) with a safe work area.

(C) Collecting samples of catch.

(D) Collecting and carrying baskets of fish.

(E) Allowing the observer(s) to collect biological data and samples.

(F) Providing adequate space for storage of biological samples.

(ix) *Sampling station and operational requirements for C/P vessels.* This paragraph contains the requirements for observer sampling stations. To allow the observer to carry out the required duties, the vessel owner must provide an observer sampling station that meets the following requirements:

(A) *Accessibility*. The observer sampling station must be available to the observer at all times.

(B) *Location*. The observer sampling station must be located within 4 m of the location from which the observer samples unsorted catch.

(C) *Access*. Unobstructed passage must be provided between the observer sampling station and the location where the observer collects sample catch.

(D) *Minimum work space*. The observer must have a working area of at least 4.5 square meters, including the observer's sampling table, for sampling and storage of fish to be sampled. The observer must be able to stand upright and have a work area at least 0.9 m deep in the area in front of the table and scale.

(E) *Table*. The observer sampling station must include a table at least 0.6 m deep, 1.2 m wide and 0.9 m high and no more than 1.1 m high. The entire surface area of the table must be available for use by the observer. Any area for the observer sampling scale is in addition to the minimum space requirements for the table. The observer's sampling table must be secured to the floor or wall.

(F) *Diverter board*. The conveyor belt conveying unsorted catch must have a removable board ("diverter board") to allow all fish to be diverted from the belt directly into the observer's sampling baskets. The diverter board must be located downstream of the scale used to weigh total catch. At least 1 m of accessible belt space, located downstream of the scale used to weight total catch, must be available for the observer's use when sampling.

(G) *Other requirements*. The sampling station must be in a well-drained area that includes floor grating (or other material that prevents slipping), lighting adequate for day or night sampling, and a hose that supplies fresh or sea water to the observer.

(H) *Observer sampling scale*. The observer sample station must include a NMFS-approved platform scale (pursuant to requirements at §679.28(d)(5)) with a capacity of at least 50 kg located within 1 m of the observer's sampling table. The scale must be mounted so that the weighing surface is no more than 0.7 m above the floor.

(x) *Transfer at sea*. Observers may be transferred at-sea between catcher-processors, between catcher-processors and motherships, or between a catcher-processor and a catcher vessel. Transfers at-sea between catcher vessels is prohibited. For transfers, both vessels must:

(A) Ensure that transfers of observers at sea via small boat under its own power are carried out during daylight hours, under safe conditions, and with the agreement of observers involved.

(B) Notify observers at least 3 hours before observers are transferred, such that the observers can finish any sampling work, collect personal belongings, equipment, and scientific samples.

(C) Provide a safe pilot ladder and conduct the transfer to ensure the safety of observers during transfers.

(D) Provide an experienced crew member to assist observers in the small boat in which any transfer is made.

(xi) *Housing on vessel in port.* During all periods an observer is housed on a vessel, the vessel operator must ensure that at least one crew member is aboard.

(3) *Procurement of observer services.* Owners of vessels required to carry observers under paragraph (g)(1) of this section must arrange for observer services from an observer provider permitted by NMFS, except that:

(i) Vessels are required to procure observer services directly from the Observer Program when NMFS has determined and given notification that the vessel must carry NMFS staff or an individual authorized by NMFS in lieu of an observer provided by an observer provider.

(ii) Vessels are required to procure observer services directly from the Observer Program and an observer provider when NMFS has determined and given notification that the vessel must carry NMFS staff and/or individuals authorized by NMFS, in addition to an observer provided by an observer provider.

(4) *Observer provider responsibilities—(i) Provide qualified candidates to serve as observers.* Observer providers must provide qualified candidates to serve as observers. To be qualified, a candidate must have:

(A) A Bachelor's degree or higher from an accredited college or university with a major in one of the natural sciences;

(B) Successfully completed a minimum of 30 semester hours or equivalent in applicable biological sciences with extensive use of dichotomous keys in at least one course;

(C) Successfully completed at least one undergraduate course each in math and statistics with a minimum of 5 semester hours total for both; and

(D) Computer skills that enable the candidate to work competently with standard database software and computer hardware.

(ii) *Hiring an observer candidate.* (A) The observer provider must provide the candidate a copy of NMFS-provided pamphlets, information and other literature describing observer duties (*i.e.* The At-Sea Hake Observer Program's Observer Manual) prior to hiring an observer candidate. Observer job information is available from the Observer Program Office's Web site at <http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/research/divisions/fram/observer/index.cfm>.

(B) The observer provider must have a written contract or a written contract addendum that is signed by the observer and observer provider prior to the observer's deployment with the following clauses:

(1) That the observer will return all phone calls, emails, text messages, or other forms of communication within the time specified by the Observer Program;

(2) That the observer inform the observer provider prior to the time of embarkation if he or she is experiencing any new mental illness or physical ailments or injury since submission

of the physician's statement as required as a qualified observer candidate that would prevent him or her from performing their assigned duties.

(iii) *Ensure that observers complete duties in a timely manner.* An observer provider must ensure that observers employed by that observer provider do the following in a complete and timely manner:

(A) Submit to NMFS all data, logbooks and reports as required by the observer manual;

(B) Report for his or her scheduled debriefing and complete all debriefing responsibilities;

(C) Return all sampling and safety gear to the Observer Program Office;

(D) Submit all biological samples from the observer's deployment by the completion of the electronic vessel and/or processor survey(s); and

(E) Immediately report to the Observer Program Office and the OLE any refusal to board an assigned vessel.

(iv) *Observers provided to vessel.* Observers provided to C/P vessels:

(A) Must have a valid North Pacific groundfish observer certification with required endorsements and an At-Sea Hake Observer Program endorsement;

(B) Must not have informed the observer provider prior to the time of embarkation that he or she is experiencing a mental illness or a physical ailment or injury developed since submission of the physician's statement that would prevent him or her from performing his or her assigned duties; and

(C) Must have successfully completed all NMFS required training and briefing before deployment.

(v) *Respond to industry requests for observers.* An observer provider must provide an observer for deployment as requested pursuant to the contractual relationship with the vessel to fulfill vessel requirements for observer coverage specified under paragraph (g)(1) of this section. An alternate observer must be supplied in each case where injury or illness prevents the observer from performing his or her duties or where the observer resigns prior to completion of his or her duties. If the observer provider is unable to respond to an industry request for observer coverage from a vessel for whom the observer provider is in a contractual relationship due to lack of available observers by the estimated embarking time of the vessel, the observer provider must report it to the Observer Program at least four hours prior to the vessel's estimated embarking time.

(vi) *Provide observer salaries and benefits.* An observer provider must provide to its observer employees salaries and any other benefits and personnel services in accordance with the terms of each observer's contract.

(vii) *Provide observer deployment logistics.* An observer provider must provide to each of its observers under contract:

(A) All necessary transportation, including arrangements and logistics, to the initial location of deployment, to all subsequent vessel assignments during that deployment, and to and from the location designated for an observer to be interviewed by the Observer Program; and

(B) Lodging, per diem, and any other services necessary to observers assigned to fishing vessels.

(1) An observer under contract may be housed on a vessel to which he or she is assigned:

(i) Prior to their vessel's initial departure from port;

(ii) For a period not to exceed 24 hours following the completion of an offload when the observer has duties and is scheduled to disembark; or

(iii) For a period not to exceed 24 hours following the vessel's arrival in port when the observer is scheduled to disembark.

(2) [Reserved]

(C) An observer under contract who is between vessel assignments must be provided with shoreside accommodations in accordance with the contract between the observer and the observer provider. If the observer provider is providing accommodations, it must be at a licensed hotel, motel, bed and breakfast, or other shoreside accommodations for the duration of each period between vessel or shoreside assignments. Such accommodations must include an assigned bed for each observer and no other person may be assigned that bed for the duration of that observer's stay. Additionally, no more than four beds may be in any room housing observers at accommodations meeting the requirements of this section.

(viii) *Observer deployment limitations.* An observer provider must not exceed observer deployment limitations specified in this paragraph unless alternative arrangements are approved by the Observer Program Office. An observer provider must not:

(A) Deploy an observer on the same vessel for more than 90 days in a 12-month period;

(B) Deploy an observer for more than 90 days in a single deployment;

(C) Include more than four vessel assignments in a single deployment, or

(D) Disembark an observer from a vessel before that observer has completed his or her sampling or data transmission duties.

(ix) *Verify vessel's Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Decal.* An observer provider must ensure that the observer completes an observer vessel safety checklist, and verify that a vessel has a valid USCG Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety decal as required under paragraph (h)(2)(ii)(B) of this section prior to the observer embarking on the first trip and before an observer may get underway aboard the vessel. The provider must submit all vessel safety checklists to the Observer Program, as specified by Observer Program policy.

One of the following acceptable means of verification must be used to verify the decal validity:

(A) The observer provider or employee of the observer provider, including the observer, visually inspects the decal aboard the vessel and confirms that the decal is valid according to the decal date of issuance; or

(B) The observer provider receives a hard copy of the USCG documentation of the decal issuance from the vessel owner or operator.

(x) *Maintain communications with observers.* An observer provider must have an employee responsible for observer activities on call 24 hours a day to handle emergencies involving observers or problems concerning observer logistics, whenever observers are at sea, in transit, or in port awaiting vessel reassignment.

(xi) *Maintain communications with the Observer Program Office.* An observer provider must provide all of the following information by electronic transmission (email), fax, or other method specified by NMFS.

(A) *Observer training and briefing.* Observer training and briefing registration materials must be submitted to the Observer Program Office at least 5 business days prior to the beginning of a scheduled observer at-sea hake training or briefing session. Registration materials consist of the following: The date of requested training or briefing with a list of observers including each observer's full name (*i.e.*, first, middle and last names).

(B) *Observer debriefing registration.* The observer provider must contact the Observer Program within 5 business days after the completion of an observer's deployment to schedule a date, time and location for debriefing. Observer debriefing registration information must be provided at the time of debriefing scheduling and must include the observer's name, cruise number, vessel name(s) and code(s), and requested debriefing date.

(C) *Observer provider contracts.* If requested, observer providers must submit to the Observer Program Office a completed and unaltered copy of each type of signed and valid contract (including all attachments, appendices, addendums, and exhibits incorporated into the contract) between the observer provider and those entities requiring observer services under paragraph (g)(1) of this section. Observer providers must also submit to the Observer Program Office upon request, a completed and unaltered copy of the current or most recent signed and valid contract (including all attachments, appendices, addendums, and exhibits incorporated into the contract and any agreements or policies with regard to observer compensation or salary levels) between the observer provider and the particular entity identified by the Observer Program or with specific observers. The copies must be submitted to the Observer Program Office via fax or mail within 5 business days of the request. Signed and valid contracts include the contracts an observer provider has with:

(1) Vessels required to have observer coverage as specified at paragraph (g)(1) of this section; and

(2) Observers.

(D) *Change in observer provider management and contact information.* Observer providers must submit notification of any other change to provider contact information,

including but not limited to, changes in contact name, phone number, email address, and address.

(E) *Other reports.* Reports of the following must be submitted in writing to the Observer Program Office by the observer provider via fax or email address designated by the Observer Program Office within 24 hours after the observer provider becomes aware of the information:

(1) Any information regarding possible observer harassment;

(2) Any information regarding any action prohibited under §§660.12(e), 660.112 or 600.725(o), (t) and (u) of this chapter;

(3) Any concerns about vessel safety or marine casualty under 46 CFR 4.05-1(a)(1) through (7);

(4) Any observer illness or injury that prevents the observer from completing any of his or her duties described in the observer manual; and

(5) Any information, allegations or reports regarding observer conflict of interest or breach of the standards of behavior described in observer provider policy.

(xii) *Replace lost or damaged gear.* Lost or damaged gear issued to an observer by NMFS must be replaced by the observer provider. All replacements must be provided to NMFS and be in accordance with requirements and procedures identified in writing by the Observer Program Office.

(xiii) *Maintain confidentiality of information.* An observer provider must ensure that all records on individual observer performance received from NMFS under the routine use provision of the Privacy Act 5 U.S.C. 552a or other applicable law remain confidential and are not further released to any person outside the employ of the observer provider company to whom the observer was contracted except with written permission of the observer.

(xiv) *Limitations on conflict of interest.* An observer provider must meet limitations on conflict of interest. Observer providers:

(A) Must not have a direct financial interest, other than the provision of observer, catch monitor or other biological sampling services, in any federal or state managed fisheries, including but not limited to:

(1) Any ownership, mortgage holder, or other secured interest in a vessel or shoreside processor facility involved in the catching, taking, harvesting or processing of fish,

(2) Any business involved with selling supplies or services to any vessel or shoreside processors participating in a fishery managed pursuant to an FMP in the waters off the coasts of Alaska, California, Oregon, and Washington, or

(3) Any business involved with purchasing raw or processed products from any vessel or shoreside processor participating in a fishery managed pursuant to an FMP in the waters off the coasts of Alaska, California, Oregon, and Washington.

(B) Must assign observers without regard to any preference by representatives of vessels other than when an observer will be deployed.

(C) Must not solicit or accept, directly or indirectly, any gratuity, gift, favor, entertainment, loan, or anything of monetary value except for compensation for providing observer services from any person who conducts fishing or fish processing activities that are regulated by NMFS, or who has interests that may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the official duties of observer providers.

(xv) *Observer conduct and behavior.* An observer provider must develop and maintain a policy addressing observer conduct and behavior for their employees that serve as observers. The policy shall address the following behavior and conduct:

(A) Observer use of alcohol;

(B) Observer use, possession, or distribution of illegal drugs in violation of applicable law; and

(C) Sexual contact with personnel of the vessel or processing facility to which the observer is assigned, or with any vessel or processing plant personnel who may be substantially affected by the performance or non-performance of the observer's official duties.

(D) An observer provider shall provide a copy of its conduct and behavior policy by February 1 of each year, to observers, observer candidates, and the Observer Program Office.

(xvi) *Refusal to deploy an observer.* Observer providers may refuse to deploy an observer on a requesting vessel if the observer provider has determined that the requesting vessel is inadequate or unsafe pursuant to those regulations described at §600.746 of this chapter or U.S. Coast Guard and other applicable rules, regulations, statutes, or guidelines pertaining to safe operation of the vessel.

(5) *Observer certification and responsibilities—(i) Applicability.* Observer certification authorizes an individual to fulfill duties as specified in writing by the Observer Program Office while under the employ of an observer provider and according to certification endorsements as designated under paragraph (g)(5)(iii) of this section.

(ii) *Observer certification official.* The Regional Administrator will designate a NMFS observer certification official who will make decisions for the Observer Program Office on whether to issue or deny observer certifications and endorsements.

(iii) *Certification requirements—(A) Initial certification.* NMFS may certify individuals who, in addition to any other relevant considerations:

(1) Are employed by an observer provider company holding a valid North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program permit at the time of the issuance of the certification to the observer;

(2) Have provided, through their observer provider:

(i) Information set forth at §679.52(b) of this chapter regarding an observer candidate's health and physical fitness for the job;

(ii) Meet all observer education and health standards as specified in §679.52(b) of this chapter; and

(iii) Have successfully completed NMFS-approved training as prescribed by the Observer Program. Successful completion of training by an observer applicant consists of meeting all attendance and conduct standards issued in writing at the start of training; meeting all performance standards issued in writing at the start of training for assignments, tests, and other evaluation tools; and completing all other training requirements established by the Observer Program.

(iv) Have not been decertified under paragraph (g)(5)(ix) of this section, or pursuant to §679.53(c) of this chapter.

(B) [Reserved]

(iv) *Denial of a certification.* The NMFS observer certification official will issue a written determination denying observer certification if the candidate fails to successfully complete training, or does not meet the qualifications for certification for any other relevant reason.

(v) *Issuance of an observer certification.* An observer certification may be issued upon determination by the observer certification official that the candidate has successfully met all requirements for certification as specified in paragraph (g)(6)(iii) of this section. The following endorsements must be obtained, in addition to observer certification, in order for an observer to deploy.

(A) *North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program certification training endorsement.* A certification training endorsement signifies the successful completion of the training course required to obtain observer certification. This endorsement expires when the observer has not been deployed and performed sampling duties as required by the Observer Program Office for a period of time, specified by the Observer Program, after his or her most recent debriefing. The observer can renew the endorsement by successfully completing certification training once more.

(B) *North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program annual general endorsements.* Each observer must obtain an annual general endorsement to their certification prior to his or her first deployment within any calendar year subsequent to a year in which a certification training endorsement is obtained. To obtain an annual general endorsement, an observer must successfully complete the annual briefing, as specified by the Observer Program. All briefing attendance, performance, and conduct standards required by the Observer Program must be met.

(C) *North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program deployment endorsements.* Each observer who has completed an initial deployment after certification or annual briefing must receive a deployment endorsement to their certification prior to any subsequent deployments for the remainder of that year. An observer may obtain a deployment endorsement by successfully completing all pre-cruise briefing requirements. The type of briefing the observer must attend and successfully complete will be specified in writing by the Observer Program during the observer's most recent debriefing.

(D) *At-Sea Hake Observer Program endorsements.* A Pacific whiting fishery endorsement is required for purposes of performing observer duties aboard vessels that process groundfish at sea in the Pacific whiting fishery. A Pacific whiting fishery endorsement to an observer's certification may be obtained by meeting the following requirements:

(1) Have a valid North Pacific groundfish observer certification.

(2) Receive an evaluation by NMFS for his or her most recent deployment that indicated that the observer's performance met Observer Program expectations for that deployment;

(3) Successfully complete any required briefings as prescribed by the Observer Program; and

(4) Comply with all of the other requirements of this section.

(vi) *Maintaining the validity of an observer certification.* After initial issuance, an observer must keep their certification valid by meeting all of the following requirements specified below:

(A) Successfully perform their assigned duties as described in the observer manual or other written instructions from the Observer Program.

(B) Accurately record their sampling data, write complete reports, and report accurately any observations of suspected violations of regulations relevant to conservation of marine resources or their environment.

(C) Not disclose collected data and observations made on board the vessel or in the processing facility to any person except the owner or operator of the observed vessel or an authorized officer or NMFS.

(D) Successfully complete any required briefings as prescribed by the At-Sea Hake Observer Program.

(E) Successful completion of briefing by an observer applicant consists of meeting all attendance and conduct standards issued in writing at the start of training; meeting all performance standards issued in writing at the start of training for assignments, tests, and other evaluation tools; and completing all other briefing requirements established by the Observer Program.

(F) Successfully meet all debriefing expectations including meeting Observer Program performance standards reporting for assigned debriefings or interviews.

(G) Submit all data and information required by the Observer Program within the program's stated guidelines.

(vii) *Limitations on conflict of interest.* Observers:

(A) Must not have a direct financial interest, other than the provision of observer services or catch monitor services, in a North Pacific fishery managed pursuant to an FMP

for the waters off the coast of Alaska, Alaska state waters, or in a Pacific Coast fishery managed by either the state or Federal Governments in waters off Washington, Oregon, or California, including but not limited to:

(1) Any ownership, mortgage holder, or other secured interest in a vessel, shore-based or floating stationary processor facility involved in the catching, taking, harvesting or processing of fish,

(2) Any business involved with selling supplies or services to any vessel, shore-based or floating stationary processing facility; or

(3) Any business involved with purchasing raw or processed products from any vessel, shore-based or floating stationary processing facilities.

(B) Must not solicit or accept, directly or indirectly, any gratuity, gift, favor, entertainment, loan, or anything of monetary value from anyone who either conducts activities that are regulated by NMFS in the Pacific coast or North Pacific regions or has interests that may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the observers' official duties.

(C) May not serve as observers on any vessel or at any shore-based owned or operated by a person who employed the observer in the last two years.

(D) May not solicit or accept employment as a crew member or an employee of a vessel or shore-based processor while employed by an observer provider.

(E) Provisions for remuneration of observers under this section do not constitute a conflict of interest.

(viii) *Standards of behavior.* Observers must:

(A) Perform their assigned duties as described in the observer manual or other written instructions from the Observer Program Office.

(B) Accurately record their sampling data, write complete reports, and report accurately any observations of suspected violations of regulations relevant to conservation of marine resources or their environment.

(C) Not disclose collected data and observations made on board the vessel to any person except the owner or operator of the observed vessel, an authorized officer, or NMFS.

(ix) *Suspension and decertification*— (A) *Suspension and decertification review official.* The Regional Administrator (or a designee) will designate an observer suspension and decertification review official(s), who will have the authority to review observer certifications and issue IADs of observer certification suspension and/or decertification.

(B) *Causes for suspension or decertification.* The suspension/decertification official may initiate suspension or decertification proceedings against an observer:

(1) When it is alleged that the observer has committed any acts or omissions of any of the following: Failed to satisfactorily perform the duties of observers as specified in writing by

the Observer Program; or failed to abide by the standards of conduct for observers (including conflicts of interest);

(2) Upon conviction of a crime or upon entry of a civil judgment for: Commission of fraud or other violation in connection with obtaining or attempting to obtain certification, or in performing the duties as specified in writing by the Observer Program; commission of embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification or destruction of records, making false statements, or receiving stolen property; or commission of any other offense indicating a lack of integrity or honesty that seriously and directly affects the fitness of observers.

(C) *Issuance of an IAD.* Upon determination that suspension or decertification is warranted, the suspension/decertification official will issue a written IAD to the observer via certified mail at the observer's most current address provided to NMFS. The IAD will identify whether a certification is suspended or revoked and will identify the specific reasons for the action taken. Decertification is effective 30 calendar days after the date on the IAD, unless there is an appeal.

(D) *Appeals.* A certified observer who receives an IAD that suspends or revokes the observer certification may appeal the determination within 30 calendar days after the date on the IAD to the Office of Administrative Appeals pursuant to §660.19.

§660.216 Fixed gear fishery—observer requirements.

(a) *Observer coverage requirements*—(1) *Harvesting vessels*. When NMFS notifies the owner, operator, permit holder, or the manager of a harvesting vessel of any requirement to carry an observer, the harvesting vessel may not be used to fish for groundfish without carrying an observer.

(2) *Processing vessels*. Unless specified otherwise by the Observer Program, any vessel 125 ft (38.1 m) LOA or longer that is engaged in at-sea processing must carry two certified observers procured from a permitted observer provider, and any vessel shorter than 125 ft (38.1 m) LOA that is engaged in at-sea processing must carry one certified observer procured from a permitted observer provider, each day that the vessel is used to take, retain, receive, land, process, or transport groundfish. Owners of vessels required to carry observers under this paragraph must arrange for observer services from a permitted observer provider except when the Observer Program has determined and given notification that the vessel must carry NMFS staff or an individual authorized by NMFS in addition to or in lieu of an observer provided by a permitted observer provider.

(b) *Notice of departure basic rule*. At least 24 hours (but not more than 36 hours) before departing on a fishing trip, a harvesting vessel that has been notified by NMFS that it is required to carry an observer, or that is operating in an active sampling unit, must notify NMFS (or its designated agent) of the vessel's intended time of departure.

(1) *Optional notice—weather delays*. A harvesting vessel that anticipates a delayed departure due to weather or sea conditions may advise NMFS of the anticipated delay when providing the basic notice described in paragraph (b) of this section. If departure is delayed beyond 36 hours from the time the original notice is given, the vessel must provide an additional notice of departure not less than four hours prior to departure, in order to enable NMFS to place an observer.

(2) *Optional notice—back-to-back fishing trips*. A harvesting vessel that intends to make back-to-back fishing trips (*i.e.*, trips with less than 24 hours between offloading from one trip and beginning another), may provide the basic notice described in paragraph (b) of this section for both trips, prior to making the first trip. A vessel that has given such notice is not required to give additional notice of the second trip.

(c) *Cease fishing report*. Within 24 hours of ceasing the taking and retaining of groundfish, vessel owners, operators, or managers must notify NMFS or its designated agent that fishing has ceased. This requirement applies to any harvesting and processing vessel that is required to carry an observer, or that is operating in a segment of the fleet that NMFS has identified as an active sampling unit.

(d) *Waiver*. The West Coast Regional Administrator (or designee) may provide written notification to the vessel owner stating that a determination has been made to temporarily waive coverage requirements because of circumstances that are deemed to be beyond the vessel's control.

(e) *Vessel responsibilities*—(1) *Accommodations and food*. An operator of a vessel required to carry one or more observer(s) must provide accommodations and food that are Equivalent to those provided to the crew.

(2) *Safe conditions.* Maintain safe conditions on the vessel for the protection of observer(s) including adherence to all USCG and other applicable rules, regulations, or statutes pertaining to safe operation of the vessel, and provisions at §§600.725 and 600.746 of this chapter. Have on board a valid Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Decal that certifies compliance with regulations found in 33 CFR chapter I and 46 CFR chapter I, a certificate of compliance issued pursuant to 46 CFR 28.710 or a valid certificate of inspection pursuant to 46 U.S.C. 3311.

(3) *Observer communications.* Facilitate observer communications by:

(i) *Observer use of equipment.* Allowing observer(s) to use the vessel's communication equipment and personnel, on request, for the entry, transmission, and receipt of work-related messages, at no cost to the observer(s), the observer provider or NMFS.

(ii) *Functional equipment.* Ensuring that the vessel's communications equipment, used by observers to enter and transmit data, is fully functional and operational.

(4) *Vessel position.* Allow observer(s) access to, and the use of, the vessel's navigation equipment and personnel, on request, to determine the vessel's position.

(5) *Access.* Allow observer(s) free and unobstructed access to the vessel's bridge, trawl or working decks, holding bins, processing areas, freezer spaces, weight scales, cargo holds, and any other space that may be used to hold, process, weigh, or store fish or fish products at any time.

(6) *Prior notification.* Notify observer(s) at least 15 minutes before fish are brought on board, or fish and fish products are transferred from the vessel, to allow sampling the catch or observing the transfer, unless the observer specifically requests not to be notified.

(7) *Records.* Allow observer(s) to inspect and copy any state or Federal logbook maintained voluntarily or as required by regulation.

(8) *Assistance.* Provide all other reasonable assistance to enable observer(s) to carry out their duties, including, but not limited to:

(i) Measuring decks, codends, and holding bins.

(ii) Providing the observer(s) with a safe work area.

(iii) Collecting bycatch when requested by the observer(s).

(iv) Collecting and carrying baskets of fish when requested by the observer(s).

(v) Allowing the observer(s) to collect biological data and samples.

(vi) Providing adequate space for storage of biological samples.

(f) *Observer sampling station.* This paragraph contains the requirements for observer sampling stations. The vessel owner must provide an observer sampling station that complies with this section so that the observer can carry out required duties.

(1) *Accessibility*. The observer sampling station must be available to the observer at all times.

(2) *Location*. The observer sampling station must be located within four meters of the location from which the observer samples unsorted catch. Unobstructed passage must be provided between the observer sampling station and the location where the observer collects sample catch.

[75 FR 60897, Oct. 1, 2010, as amended at 77 FR 55158, Sept. 7, 2012; 78 FR 68773, Nov. 15, 2013; 80 FR 22301, Apr. 21, 2015]

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§660.316 Open access fishery—observer requirements.

(a) *Observer coverage requirements—(1) Harvesting vessels.* When NMFS notifies the owner, operator, permit holder, or the manager of a harvesting vessel of any requirement to carry an observer, the harvesting vessel may not be used to fish for groundfish without carrying an observer.

(2) *Processing vessels.* Unless specified otherwise by the Observer Program, any vessel 125 ft (38.1 m) LOA or longer that is engaged in at-sea processing must carry two certified observers procured from a permitted observer provider, and any vessel shorter than 125 ft (38.1 m) LOA that is engaged in at-sea processing must carry one certified observer procured from a permitted observer provider, each day that the vessel is used to take, retain, receive, land, process, or transport groundfish. Owners of vessels required to carry observers under this paragraph must arrange for observer services from a permitted observer provider except when the Observer Program has determined and given notification that the vessel must carry NMFS staff or an individual authorized by NMFS in addition to or in lieu of an observer provided by a permitted observer provider.

(b) *Notice of departure—basic rule.* At least 24 hours (but not more than 36 hours) before departing on a fishing trip, a harvesting vessel that has been notified by NMFS that it is required to carry an observer, or that is operating in an active sampling unit, must notify NMFS (or its designated agent) of the vessel's intended time of departure. Notice will be given in a form to be specified by NMFS.

(1) *Optional notice—weather delays.* A harvesting vessel that anticipates a delayed departure due to weather or sea conditions may advise NMFS of the anticipated delay when providing the basic notice described in paragraph (b) of this section. If departure is delayed beyond 36 hours from the time the original notice is given, the vessel must provide an additional notice of departure not less than four hours prior to departure, in order to enable NMFS to place an observer.

(2) *Optional notice—back-to-back fishing trips.* A harvesting vessel that intends to make back-to-back fishing trips (*i.e.*, trips with less than 24 hours between offloading from one trip and beginning another), may provide the basic notice described in paragraph (b) of this section for both trips, prior to making the first trip. A vessel that has given such notice is not required to give additional notice of the second trip.

(c) *Cease fishing report.* Within 24 hours of ceasing the taking and retaining of groundfish, vessel owners, operators, or managers must notify NMFS or its designated agent that fishing has ceased. This requirement applies to any harvesting or processing vessel that is required to carry an observer, or that is operating in a segment of the fleet that NMFS has identified as an active sampling unit.

(d) *Waiver.* The West Coast Regional Administrator (or designate) may provide written notification to the vessel owner stating that a determination has been made to temporarily waive coverage requirements because of circumstances that are deemed to be beyond the vessel's control.

(e) *Vessel responsibilities—(1) Accommodations and food.* An operator of a vessel required to carry one or more observer(s) must provide accommodations and food that are Equivalent to those provided to the crew.

(2) *Safe conditions.* Maintain safe conditions on the vessel for the protection of observer(s) including adherence to all USCG and other applicable rules, regulations, or statutes pertaining to safe operation of the vessel, and provisions at §§600.725 and 600.746 of this chapter. Have on board a valid Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Decal that certifies compliance with regulations found in 33 CFR chapter I and 46 CFR chapter I, a certificate of compliance issued pursuant to 46 CFR 28.710 or a valid certificate of inspection pursuant to 46 U.S.C. 3311.

(3) *Observer communications.* Facilitate observer communications by:

(i) *Observer use of equipment.* Allowing observer(s) to use the vessel's communication equipment and personnel, on request, for the entry, transmission, and receipt of work-related messages, at no cost to the observer(s), observer provider or NMFS.

(ii) *Functional equipment.* Ensuring that the vessel's communications equipment, used by observers to enter and transmit data, is fully functional and operational.

(4) *Vessel position.* Allow observer(s) access to, and the use of, the vessel's navigation equipment and personnel, on request, to determine the vessel's position.

(5) *Access.* Allow observer(s) free and unobstructed access to the vessel's bridge, trawl or working decks, holding bins, processing areas, freezer spaces, weight scales, cargo holds, and any other space that may be used to hold, process, weigh, or store fish or fish products at any time.

(6) *Prior notification.* Notify observer(s) at least 15 minutes before fish are brought on board, or fish and fish products are transferred from the vessel, to allow sampling the catch or observing the transfer, unless the observer specifically requests not to be notified.

(7) *Records.* Allow observer(s) to inspect and copy any state or Federal logbook maintained voluntarily or as required by regulation.

(8) *Assistance.* Provide all other reasonable assistance to enable observer(s) to carry out their duties, including, but not limited to:

(i) Measuring decks, codends, and holding bins.

(ii) Providing the observer(s) with a safe work area.

(iii) Collecting bycatch when requested by the observer(s).

(iv) Collecting and carrying baskets of fish when requested by the observer(s).

(v) Allowing the observer(s) to collect biological data and samples.

(vi) Providing adequate space for storage of biological samples.

(f) *Observer sampling station.* This paragraph contains the requirements for observer sampling stations. The vessel owner must provide an observer sampling station that complies with this section so that the observer can carry out required duties.

(1) *Accessibility*. The observer sampling station must be available to the observer at all times.

(2) *Location*. The observer sampling station must be located within four meters of the location from which the observer samples unsorted catch. Unobstructed passage must be provided between the observer sampling station and the location where the observer collects sample catch.

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