



West Coast Region Update on Issuance of Observer and Catch Monitor Waivers

1 message

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West Coast Region Update on Issuance of Observer and Catch Monitor Waivers

On June 17, 2021, NOAA Fisheries provided [updated information](#) relative to the national-level criteria for vessels to be waived (released) from at-sea observer or shore-based catch monitor coverage requirements under the authority of the emergency rule originally published on March 24, 2020 ([85 FR 17285](#)) and recently extended on March 29, 2021 ([86 FR 16307](#)), in light of COVID-19 vaccination efforts.

The West Coast Region provides the following update specific to the protocols in place for domestically-managed fisheries in this Region with full or partial observer and/or catch monitor coverage. Observer protocols in the international HMS fisheries are not included in these updates. Observer and catch monitor providers have updated their protocols specifically to be consistent with the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) guidelines](#) for fully vaccinated persons. Vaccination rates of West Coast observers/monitors are nearly 100 percent.

Waivers will not be issued if there is an observer/monitor available that has completed a 14-day self-isolation period, or if a fully vaccinated observer/monitor is available.

We remain committed to the public health and safety of fishermen, observers, and their communities, while fulfilling our mission to maintain our nation's seafood supply and conserving marine life. We will continue to monitor local public health notifications and the CDC for any updates and adapt as needed.

1. Pre-trip screening. All observers and catch monitors, regardless of vaccination status, must complete a pre-trip screening questionnaire before each trip that is designed to ensure that observers are following the provider's protocols and to screen for COVID-19 symptoms and exposure. Observers and catch monitors that fail the screening are not deployed until they receive a negative COVID-19 test or can complete an additional 14-day self-isolation period.
2. Testing. All observers and catch monitors, regardless of vaccination status, are required to receive a viral COVID-19 test according to CDC guidelines and in the following scenarios:
 - a. The observer/catch monitor answers "yes" to any of the pre-trip screening questions.
 - b. The observer/catch monitor is exhibiting signs or symptoms consistent with COVID-19.
 - c. When requested by a licensed physician.
 - d. In conjunction with vessel protocols ahead of deployments.

Consistent with the CDC guidelines for fully vaccinated persons, providers are discontinuing mandatory 14 day self-isolation for observers and catch monitors prior to deployment and one-to-one observer-to-vessel and plant placement.

Vessel owners/operators should notify the Observer Program if their vessel or vessel company are following stricter safety protocols than those listed above that they would like the federally-contracted observer to follow. Contact NOAA Fisheries' Northwest Fisheries Science Center Observer Program at (866) 780-8064 for groundfish fisheries or West Coast Region Observer Program at (562) 980-4033 for highly migratory species fisheries.

Please give the Observer Programs at least two weeks' notice of the vessel's specific protocols, and longer if the provider would need additional time to comply with the protocols before deployment. Vessel owners/operators and processors in the West Coast Groundfish trawl fishery should contact their individually-contracted observer/catch monitor providers to discuss specific protocols.

Fishery Bulletins and Notices

Visit NOAA Fisheries' Rules & Regulations directory to learn more about recent federal management actions affecting managed fish species on the West Coast.

Visit the NOAA Fisheries West Coast Regional Office website

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