

Fishery Conservation and Management

§ 660.312

fm (914-m), within the Davidson Seamount area (defined in § 660.395).

(i) *Groundfish observer program.* (1) Forcibly assault, resist, oppose, impede, intimidate, harass, sexually harass, bribe, or interfere with an observer.

(2) Interfere with or bias the sampling procedure employed by an observer, including either mechanically or physically sorting or discarding catch before sampling.

(3) Tamper with, destroy, or discard an observer's collected samples, equipment, records, photographic film, papers, or personal effects without the express consent of the observer.

(4) Harass an observer by conduct that:

(i) Has sexual connotations,

(ii) Has the purpose or effect of interfering with the observer's work performance, and/or

(iii) Otherwise creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment. In determining whether conduct constitutes harassment, the totality of the circumstances, including the nature of the conduct and the context in which it occurred, will be considered. The determination of the legality of a particular action will be made from the facts on a case-by-case basis.

(5) Fish for, land, or process fish without observer coverage when a vessel is required to carry an observer under § 660.314(c).

(6) Require, pressure, coerce, or threaten an observer to perform duties normally performed by crew members, including, but not limited to, cooking, washing dishes, standing watch, vessel maintenance, assisting with the setting or retrieval of gear, or any duties associated with the processing of fish, from sorting the catch to the storage of the finished product.

(7) Fail to provide departure or cease fishing reports specified at § 660.314(c)(2).

(8) Fail to meet the vessel responsibilities specified at § 660.314(d).

(j) *Vessel monitoring systems.* (1) Use any vessel required to operate a VMS unit under § 660.312 (b) unless that vessel carries a NMFS OLE type-approved mobile transceiver unit and complies with all the requirements described at § 660.312.

(2) Fail to install, activate, repair or replace a mobile transceiver unit prior to leaving port as specified at § 660.312.

(3) Fail to operate and maintain a mobile transceiver unit on board the vessel at all times as specified at § 660.312.

(4) Tamper with, damage, destroy, alter, or in any way distort, render useless, inoperative, ineffective, or inaccurate the VMS, mobile transceiver unit, or VMS signal required to be installed on or transmitted by a vessel as specified at § 660.312.

(5) Fail to contact NMFS OLE or follow NMFS OLE instructions when automatic position reporting has been interrupted as specified at § 660.312.

(6) Register the same VMS transceiver unit to more than one vessel at the same time.

(7) Falsify any VMS activation report or VMS exemption report that is authorized or required, as specified at § 660.312.

(8) Falsify any declaration report that is required, as specified at § 660.303.

[69 FR 42348, July 15, 2004, as amended at 69 FR 77029, Dec. 23, 2004; 70 FR 16148, Mar. 30, 2005; 71 FR 10620, Mar. 2, 2006; 71 FR 27415, May 11, 2006; 71 FR 66139, Nov. 13, 2006; 71 FR 78653, Dec. 29, 2006; 72 FR 50910, Sept. 5, 2007; 72 FR 69169, Dec. 7, 2007; 74 FR 9887, Mar. 6, 2009; 74 FR 10192, Mar. 10, 2009; 74 FR 11881, Mar. 20, 2009]

§ 660.312 Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) requirements.

(a) *What is a VMS?* A VMS consists of a NMFS OLE type-approved mobile transceiver unit that automatically determines the vessel's position and transmits it to a NMFS OLE type-approved communications service provider. The communications service provider receives the transmission and relays it to NMFS OLE.

(b) *Who is required to have VMS?* The following vessels are required to install a NMFS OLE type-approved mobile transceiver unit and to arrange for a NMFS OLE type-approved communications service provider to receive and relay transmissions to NMFS OLE prior to fishing:

(1) Any vessel registered for use with a limited entry permit that fishes in state or Federal waters seaward of the baseline from which the territorial sea

is measured off the States of Washington, Oregon or California (0–200 nm offshore).

(2) Any vessel that uses non-groundfish trawl gear to fish in the EEZ.

(3) Any vessel that uses open access gear to take and retain, or possess groundfish in the EEZ or land groundfish taken in the EEZ.

(c) *How are mobile transceiver units and communications service providers approved by NMFS OLE?* (1) NMFS OLE will publish type-approval specifications for VMS components in the FEDERAL REGISTER or notify the public through other appropriate media.

(2) Mobile transceiver unit manufacturers or communication service providers will submit products or services to NMFS OLE for evaluation based on the published specifications.

(3) NMFS OLE may publish a list of NMFS OLE type-approved mobile transceiver units and communication service providers for the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery in the FEDERAL REGISTER or notify the public through other appropriate media. As necessary, NMFS OLE may publish amendments to the list of type-approved mobile transceiver units and communication service providers in the FEDERAL REGISTER or through other appropriate media. A list of VMS transceivers that have been type-approved by NMFS OLE may be mailed to the permit owner's address of record. NMFS will bear no responsibility if a notification is sent to the address of record and is not received because the applicant's actual address has changed without notification to NMFS, as required at 660.335(a)(2).

(d) *What are the vessel owner's responsibilities?* If you are a vessel owner that must participate in the VMS program, you or the vessel operator must:

(1) Obtain a NMFS OLE type-approved mobile transceiver unit and have it installed on board your vessel in accordance with the instructions provided by NMFS OLE. You may obtain a copy of the VMS installation and operation instructions from the NMFS OLE Northwest, VMS Program Manager upon request at 7600 Sand Point Way NE., Seattle, WA 98115–6349, phone: (206) 526–6133.

(2) Activate the mobile transceiver unit, submit an activation report at least 72 hours prior to leaving port on a trip in which VMS is required, and receive confirmation from NMFS OLE that the VMS transmissions are being received before participating in a fishery requiring the VMS. Instructions for submitting an activation report may be obtained from the NMFS, Northwest OLE VMS Program Manager upon request at 7600 Sand Point Way NE., Seattle, WA 98115–6349, phone: (206)526–6133. An activation report must again be submitted to NMFS OLE following reinstallation of a mobile transceiver unit or change in service provider before the vessel may participate in a fishery requiring the VMS.

(i) *Activation reports.* If you are a vessel owner who must use VMS and you are activating a VMS transceiver unit for the first time or reactivating a VMS transceiver unit following a reinstallation of a mobile transceiver unit or change in service provider, you must fax NMFS OLE an activation report that includes: Vessel name; vessel owner's name, address and telephone number, vessel operator's name, address and telephone number, USCG vessel documentation number/state registration number; if applicable, the groundfish permit number the vessel is registered to; VMS transceiver unit manufacturer; VMS communications service provider; VMS transceiver identification; identifying if the unit is the primary or backup; and a statement signed and dated by the vessel owner confirming compliance with the installation procedures provided by NMFS OLE.

(ii) *Transferring ownership of VMS unit.* Ownership of the VMS transceiver unit may be transferred from one vessel owner to another vessel owner if all of the following documents are provided to NMFS OLE: a new activation report, which identifies that the transceiver unit was previously registered to another vessel; a notarized bill of sale showing proof of ownership of the VMS transceiver unit; documentation from the communications service provider showing proof that the service agreement for the previous vessel was terminated and that a service agreement was established for the new vessel.

(3) *Transceiver unit operation.* Operate and maintain in good working order the mobile transceiver unit continuously 24 hours a day throughout the fishing year, unless such vessel is exempted under paragraph (d)(4) of this section. The mobile transceiver unit must transmit a signal accurately indicating the vessel's position at least once every hour, 24 hours a day, throughout the year unless a valid exemption report, as described in paragraph (b)(4) of this section, has been received by NMFS OLE. Less frequent position reporting at least once every four hours is authorized when a vessel remains in port for an extended period of time, but the mobile transceiver unit must remain in continuous operation at all times unless the vessel is exempted under this section.

(4) *VMS exemptions.* A vessel that is required to operate the mobile transceiver unit continuously 24 hours a day throughout the fishing year may be exempted from this requirement if a valid exemption report, as described in paragraph (d)(4)(vii) of this section, is received by NMFS OLE and the vessel is in compliance with all conditions and requirements of the VMS exemption identified in this section and specified in the exemption report.

(i) *Haul out exemption.* When it is anticipated that a vessel will be continuously out of the water for more than 7 consecutive days and a valid exemption report has been received by NMFS OLE, electrical power to the VMS mobile transceiver unit may be removed and transmissions may be discontinued. Under this exemption, VMS transmissions can be discontinued from the time the vessel is removed from the water until the time that the vessel is placed back in the water.

(ii) *Outside areas exemption.* When the vessel will be operating seaward of the EEZ off Washington, Oregon, or California continuously for more than 7 consecutive days and a valid exemption report has been received by NMFS OLE, the VMS mobile transceiver unit transmissions may be reduced or discontinued from the time the vessel leaves the EEZ off the coasts of Washington, Oregon or California until the time that the vessel re-enters the EEZ off the coasts of Washington, Oregon or

California. Under this exemption, the vessel owner or operator can request that NMFS OLE reduce or discontinue the VMS transmissions after receipt of an exemption report, if the vessel is equipped with a VMS transceiver unit that NMFS OLE has approved for this exemption.

(iii) *Permit transfer exemption.* If the limited entry permit has been transferred from a vessel (for the purposes of this section, this includes permits placed into "unidentified" status) the vessel may be exempted from VMS requirements providing the vessel is not used to fish in state or Federal waters seaward of the baseline from which the territorial sea is measured off the States of Washington, Oregon or California (0-200 nm offshore) for the remainder of the fishing year. If the vessel is used to fish in this area for any species of fish at any time during the remaining portion of the fishing year without being registered to a limited entry permit, the vessel is required to have and use VMS.

(iv) *Long-term departure exemption.* A vessel participating in the open access fishery that is required to have VMS under §660.312 (b)(3) may be exempted from VMS provisions after the end of the fishing year in which it participated in the open access fishery, providing the vessel submits a completed exemption report signed by the vessel owner that includes a statement signed by the vessel owner indicating that the vessel will not be used to take and retain or possess groundfish in the EEZ or land groundfish taken in the EEZ during the new fishing year.

(v) *Emergency exemption.* Vessels required to have VMS under 660.312(b) may be exempted from VMS provisions in emergency situations that are beyond the vessel owner's control, including but not limited to: fire, flooding, or extensive physical damage to critical areas of the vessel. A vessel owner may apply for an emergency exemption from the VMS requirements specified in §660.312(b) for his/her vessel by sending a written request to NMFS OLE specifying the following information: The reasons for seeking an exemption, including any supporting documents (e.g., repair invoices, photographs

showing damage to the vessel, insurance claim forms, etc.); the time period for which the exemption is requested; and the location of the vessel while the exemption is in effect. NMFS OLE will issue a written determination granting or denying the emergency exemption request. A vessel will not be covered by the emergency exemption until NMFS OLE issues a determination granting the exemption. If an exemption is granted, the duration of the exemption will be specified in the NMFS OLE determination.

(vi) *Submission of exemption reports.* Signed long-term departure exemption reports must be submitted by fax or by emailing a electronic copy of the actual report. In the event of an emergency in which an emergency exemption request will be submitted, initial contact with NMFS OLE must be made by telephone, fax or email within 24 hours from when the incident occurred. Emergency exemption requests must be requested in writing within 72 hours from when the incident occurred. Other exemption reports must be submitted through the VMS or another method that is approved by NMFS OLE and announced in the FEDERAL REGISTER. Submission methods for exemption requests, except long-term departures and emergency exemption requests, may include email, facsimile, or telephone. NMFS OLE will provide, through appropriate media, instructions to the public on submitting exemption reports. Instructions and other information needed to make exemption reports may be mailed to the vessel owner's address of record. NMFS will bear no responsibility if a notification is sent to the address of record for the vessel owner and is not received because the vessel owner's actual address has changed without notification to NMFS, as required at § 660.335(a)(2). Owners of vessels required to use VMS who do not receive instructions by mail are responsible for contacting NMFS OLE during business hours at least 3 days before the exemption is required to obtain information needed to make exemption reports. NMFS OLE must be contacted during business hours (Monday through Friday between 0800 and 1700 Pacific Time).

(vii) *Valid exemption reports.* For an exemption report to be valid, it must be received by NMFS at least 2 hours and not more than 24 hours before the exempted activities defined at paragraph (d)(4)(i) through (iv) of this section occur. An exemption report is valid until NMFS receives a report canceling the exemption. An exemption cancellation must be received at least 2 hours before the vessel re-enters the EEZ following an outside areas exemption; at least 2 hours before the vessel is placed back in the water following a haul out exemption; at least 2 hours before the vessel resumes fishing for any species of fish in state or Federal waters off the States of Washington, Oregon, or California after it has received a permit transfer exemption; or at least 2 hours before a vessel resumes fishing in the open access fishery after a long-term departure exemption. If a vessel is required to submit an activation report under § 660.312(d)(2)(i) before returning to fish, that report may substitute for the exemption cancellation. Initial contact must be made with NMFS OLE not more than 24 hours after the time that an emergency situation occurred in which VMS transmissions were disrupted and followed by a written emergency exemption request within 72 hours from when the incident occurred. If the emergency situation upon which an emergency exemption is based is resolved before the exemption expires, an exemption cancellation must be received by NMFS at least 2 hours before the vessel resumes fishing.

(5) When aware that transmission of automatic position reports has been interrupted, or when notified by NMFS OLE that automatic position reports are not being received, contact NMFS OLE at 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115-6349, phone: (206)526-6133 and follow the instructions provided to you. Such instructions may include, but are not limited to, manually communicating to a location designated by NMFS OLE the vessel's position or returning to port until the VMS is operable.

(6) After a fishing trip during which interruption of automatic position reports has occurred, the vessel's owner or operator must replace or repair the

mobile transceiver unit prior to the vessel's next fishing trip. Repair or reinstallation of a mobile transceiver unit or installation of a replacement, including change of communications service provider shall be in accordance with the instructions provided by NMFS OLE and require the same certification.

(7) Make the mobile transceiver units available for inspection by NMFS OLE personnel, USCG personnel, state enforcement personnel or any authorized officer.

(8) Ensure that the mobile transceiver unit is not tampered with, disabled, destroyed or operated improperly.

(9) Pay all charges levied by the communication service provider as necessary to ensure continuous operation of the VMS transceiver units.

[68 FR 62384, Nov. 4, 2003. Redesignated and amended at 69 FR 42350, July 15, 2004; 72 FR 69169, Dec. 7, 2007; 73 FR 4759, Jan. 28, 2008]

§ 660.314 Groundfish observer program.

(a) *General.* Vessel owners, operators, and managers are jointly and severally responsible for their vessel's compliance with this section.

(b) *Purpose.* The purpose of the Groundfish Observer Program is to allow observers to collect fisheries data deemed by the Northwest Regional Administrator, NMFS, to be necessary and appropriate for management, compliance monitoring, and research in the groundfish fisheries and for the conservation of living marine resources and their habitat.

(c) *Observer coverage requirements—(1) NMFS certified observers—(i)* A catcher/processor or mothership 125-ft (38.1-m) LOA or longer must carry two NMFS-certified observers, and a catcher-processor or mothership shorter than 125-ft (38.1-m) LOA must carry one NMFS-certified observer, each day that the vessel is used to take, retain, receive, land, process, or transport groundfish.

(ii) A Pacific whiting shoreside vessel that sorts catch at sea must carry one NMFS-certified observer, from the time the vessel leaves port on a trip in which the catch is sorted at sea to the time that all catch from that trip has been offloaded.

(2) *Catcher vessels.* When NMFS notifies the owner, operator, permit holder, or the manager of a catcher vessel of any requirement to carry an observer, the catcher vessel may not be used to fish for groundfish without carrying an observer.

(i) For the purposes of this section, the term "catcher vessel" includes all of the following vessels (except vessels described in paragraphs (c)(1) and (c)(3) of this section):

(A) Any vessel registered for use with a Pacific Coast groundfish limited entry permit that fishes off the States of Washington, Oregon, or California seaward of the baseline from which the territorial sea of the United States is measured out to the seaward edge of the EEZ (*i.e.*, 0–200 nm offshore).

(B) Any vessel other than a vessel described in paragraph (c)(2)(i)(A) of this section that is used to take and retain, possess, or land groundfish in or from the EEZ.

(C) Any vessel that is required to take a Federal observer by the applicable State law.

(ii) *Notice of departure—Basic rule.* At least 24 hours (but not more than 36 hours) before departing on a fishing trip, a 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.

(A) *Optional notice—Weather delays.* A 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 (c)(2)(ii) 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 4 hours prior to departure, in order to enable NMFS to place an observer.

(B) *Optional notice—Back-to-back fishing trips.* A 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 (c)(2)(ii) of this