



NOAA FISHERIES

National Observer Program

National Observer Program Advisory Team's Safety Advisory Committee

The Safety Advisory Committee (SAC) advises the National Observer Program Advisory Team (NOPAT) on matters of observer safety, health, and welfare. It works to promote a safer and healthier environment for observers to work in and is responsible for developing and recommending the requirements necessary to fulfill NOPAT's national safety standards, including:

- Spearheading and reviewing proposals on observer safety initiatives, along with monitoring and advising on any safety policies and programs which may affect NOAA Fisheries observers.
- Addressing specific safety issues through seminars, workshops, forums, and panel discussions.
- Developing training classes and standards for Observer Programs' safety trainers.
- Creating and maintaining mechanisms to enforce safety-related policies for Observer Programs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Marine Pollution, MARPOL, and Observers

Eyes and Ears on the Water

Observers and at-sea monitors may at times witness incidents of marine pollution by vessels, whether accidental or intentional. As the eyes and ears on the water for NOAA Fisheries, it's important that observers understand the regulations surrounding marine pollution and their own responsibilities in this area. This understanding can help ensure the health and well-being of both observers and our shared marine resources.

What is MARPOL?

The International Convention on the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, or MARPOL, is the main international convention covering prevention of pollution of the marine environment by ships from operational or accidental causes.

What are some typical MARPOL violations?

MARPOL violations could include, but are not limited to:

- Pollution by oil from operational or accidental discharges.
- Lack of control for discharge of noxious liquid substances carried in bulk.
- Failure to follow standards on packing, marking, labeling, documentation, stowage, and quantity limitations of harmful substances carried by sea in packaged form.
- Discharge of garbage and/or untreated sewage.
- Disposal of any plastics into the sea.
- Failure to follow limits on sulphur oxide, nitrogen oxide and other ozone-depleting substances from ship exhaust.

When do observers report violations?

Once an observer witnesses a violation, the observer should create a narrative including information on the "who, what, when, and where" of the violation. Observers should NOT intervene or try to prevent violations. The completed narrative should be reported to the observer's Observer Program. The narrative(s) should be detailed enough for potential use by the U.S. Coast Guard.

What penalties are associated with MARPOL violations?

MARPOL violations can lead to criminal and civil penalties and fines.

Where can I learn more about MARPOL?

For information on MARPOL and its technical annexes that cover specific violations, visit the International Maritime Organization website at: imo.org.



The following U.S. Coast Guard chart provides a simplified overview of the discharge provisions of the revised MARPOL Annex V, which entered into force on 1 March 2018. Keep in mind that additional requirements may apply. The table below is only intended as a summary reference; provisions in MARPOL Annex V and the Polar Code, not the table below, prevail.

Garbage type ¹	All ships except platforms ⁴		Regulation 5 Offshore platforms located more than 12 nm from nearest land and ships when alongside or within 500 metres of such platforms ⁴
	Regulation 4 Outside special areas and Arctic waters (Distances are from the nearest land)	Regulation 6 Within special areas and Arctic waters (Distances are from nearest land, nearest ice-shelf or nearest fast ice)	
Food waste comminuted or ground ²	≥3 nm, en route and as far as practicable	≥12 nm, en route and as far as practicable ³	Discharge permitted
Food waste not comminuted or ground	≥12 nm, en route and as far as practicable	Discharge prohibited	Discharge prohibited
Cargo residues ^{5,6} not contained in washwater	≥12 nm, en route and as far as practicable	Discharge prohibited	Discharge prohibited
Cargo residues ^{5,6} contained in washwater		≥12 nm, en route and as far as practicable (subject to conditions in regulation 6.1.2 and paragraph 5.2.1.5 of part II-A of the Polar Code)	
Cleaning agents and additives ⁶ contained in cargo hold washwater	Discharge permitted	≥12 nm, en route and as far as practicable (subject to conditions in regulation 6.1.2 and paragraph 5.2.1.5 of part II-A of the Polar Code)	Discharge prohibited
Cleaning agents and additives ⁶ in deck and external surfaces washwater		Discharge permitted	
Animal Carcasses (should be split or otherwise treated to ensure the carcasses will sink immediately)	Must be en route and as far from the nearest land as possible. Should be >100 nm and maximum water depth.	Discharge prohibited	Discharge prohibited
All other garbage including plastics, synthetic ropes, fishing gear, plastic garbage bags, incinerator ashes, clinkers, cooking oil, floating dunnage, lining and packing materials, paper, rags, glass, metal, bottles, crockery and similar refuse	Discharge prohibited	Discharge prohibited	Discharge prohibited

¹When garbage is mixed with or contaminated by other harmful substances prohibited from discharge or having different discharge requirements, the more stringent requirements shall apply.

² Comminuted or ground food wastes must be able to pass through a screen with mesh no larger than 25 mm.

³ The discharge of introduced avian products in the Antarctic area is not permitted unless incinerated, autoclaved, or otherwise treated to be made sterile. In polar waters, discharge shall be made as far as practicable from areas of ice concentration exceeding 1/10 (that is, where the surrounding area is more than 10 percent covered by sea ice); in any case food wastes shall not be discharged onto the ice.

⁴ Offshore platforms located more than 12 nautical miles from nearest land and associated ships include all fixed or floating platforms engaged in exploration or exploitation or associated processing of seabed mineral resources, and all ships alongside or within 500 m of such platforms.

⁵ Cargo residues means only those cargo residues that cannot be recovered using commonly available methods for unloading.

⁶These substances must not be harmful to the marine environment.