



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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Observer Know-How: Safely Boarding Vessels

Safety First for Successful Monitoring

We depend on our observers and at-sea monitors—professionally trained biological technicians who gather crucial information about what species are caught and discarded by U.S. commercial fishing vessels—to be our eyes and ears on the water. The work of observers is critical to effective fisheries management, and their safety on the job is of utmost importance. Navigating the marine environment can be challenging. Taking care to put safety first at every step ensures those challenges are met with success.

The Challenge: Safely Boarding a Vessel

Starting a journey off on the right foot can set the tone for an entire trip. Often the things that seem simple can be more complicated than expected.

The Solution: Be Aware and Embark with Care

Accidents can be averted and risks mitigated before you even step onto the boat.

Know Before You Go

- Are you planning to board from a dock or platform, or are you switching from one vessel to another? Is there a ladder to ascend, or a plank to navigate? Knowing the details of boarding can inform the steps you take to avoid boarding hazards.
- Wear clothing that is comfortable to move in, but not so loose that it could get caught or become a tripping hazard.
- Make sure your footwear encloses your feet; avoid wearing flip-flops on deck.
- Make sure you know the effects of any medical conditions or prescriptions, and your own physical limitations affecting balance and agility.

Tips for Boarding and Landing

- Take note of conditions. Consider elements like icy and slippery decks and/or ladders, poor weather, darkness, wind, tides, currents and/or greater distances than you can manage.
- Make sure the boat is properly secured, as are any gangways or ladders used to board from the dock. If applicable, check that safety nets are in place and properly angled.
- Wear a PFD! Being prepared with proper class and fit of personal flotation device is the first line of defense in the event of an accident
- Notify someone that you are about to board.
- Do not try to jump on board, as you may slip or fall.
- Keep weight low and centered in the vessel. Stability is an important safety issue for all boats, and especially so in small craft.



Always wear a PFD!

- Stay balanced. Both hands should be free while boarding or leaving a vessel. Be mindful of the adage “one hand for yourself, one for the ship.” Maintaining a grip on a secure point of the vessel will prevent most falls.
- Ask for assistance loading gear and equipment onto the boat. Carefully pass gear to someone already on board or place it on the deck, so that your hands are both free when boarding.
- Particular care should be taken for vessels that are “sistered,” or tied side-by-side extending from the dock. When traversing vessels gunwales, rails, decks, and gear, keep hands free, wear your PFD, and have a spotter who is aware of your movement.
- Unless it’s an emergency, do not attempt a vessel-to-vessel transfer while under way or on the high seas.
- Check with your regional coordinator for further guidance.



Alert someone on board before you embark.



Keep your hands free while boarding by passing gear to someone already on deck.



Maintain a grip on a secure point of the vessel.