

# MARINE FISHERIES OBSERVER PROGRAM



## HOW TO APPLY

- Apply through the AIS website: [www.aisobservers.com/FOPapply.htm](http://www.aisobservers.com/FOPapply.htm). Attach your resume, list of biology courses, references and a cover letter detailing sea and fish experience.
- Announcement of training sessions are posted on [www.aisobservers.com](http://www.aisobservers.com), American Fisheries Society [www.fisheries.org](http://www.fisheries.org), and many other eco job sites.

## REQUIREMENTS

### Candidates must:

- have a four-year degree in Marine Biology or Biology. Consideration will be given for sea/fisheries experience.
- be a US or Canadian citizen or have been legal residents in the US for the last two years.
- have a valid passport.
- be certified in CPR and First Aid from Am. Red Cross or Am Heart Assoc.
- have their own transportation.
- Candidates must be willing to commit to the program for at least a year.

## A.I.S., Inc.

89 N Water Street  
PO Box 2093  
New Bedford, MA 02741

Phone: 508-990-9054  
Fax: 508-990-9055

[info@aisobservers.com](mailto:info@aisobservers.com)

## FISHERIES OBSERVER FACT SHEET

### JOB DUTIES

Fisheries observers collect data from commercial fishing vessels working at sea.

- Observers collect valuable fisheries information not available through research cruises or shore sampling. By doing so, observers help preserve the fish stocks and commercial fishing industry.
- Observers arrange their trips on the fishing vessels with assistance from their Area Coordinator.
- Observers conduct vessel safety checks before boarding each vessel .
- Observers collect biological and economic data including interactions with protected species.
- Observers collect vessel and trip information such as port, vessel size, number of crew, gear, and expenses (food, fuel, ice).
- Observers' primary duty is to collect data on fish caught and discarded (weight, length and age samples).
- Observers send their data logs and samples to NMFS. The data is edited, audited and loaded into a NMFS computer database for analysis of fisheries populations, fishing economics and incidental takes of marine mammals.



Observer Training Trip

## TRAINING

Observer trainees attend a four-week paid training course at the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Observer Training Center in Falmouth, MA. Housing and meals are provided during training.

Training covers the following topics: safety, fish/sea turtle/marine mammal identification, fishing gear, data collection and sampling protocols. The trainees must pass four tests with an average of 85 percent.

Trainees will take three short demonstration trips on a commercial gillnetter, trawler and scalloper. After training, trainees must successfully complete four one-day observing trips to be certified as an NMFS Fisheries Observer.

We hold at least three observer training sessions each year.

[www.aisobservers.com](http://www.aisobservers.com)

## THE OBSERVER PROGRAM

The National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Woods Hole, MA manages the Observer Program in the Northeast Region (ME to NC). NMFS contracts with AIS, Inc. to jointly manage the program. AIS, Inc. hires and manages the observers in the field. NMFS funds the program, trains the observers and sets the schedule for trips. Observers collect the data and send it to NMFS for editing and data entry. NMFS fisheries scientists use the data to manage fisheries and protect endangered species.

## FAQ

### Q. What is the role of A.I.S., Inc.?

A. A.I.S., Inc. is contracted by the National Marine Fisheries Service to manage observers in the Northeast Region. A.I.S., Inc. hires observers, deploys them in ports and assigns them sea days. A.I.S., Inc. collects the sea day reports, data logs and specimens and delivers them to NMFS.

### Q. Is this a full-time or seasonal job?

A. This is a full-time position. We do not have contracts, observers are A.I.S. employees. This is not a seasonal job, employees work year round. Employees who maintain full-time status are eligible for benefits that include vacation, holidays, health, vision and dental insurance. We also provide 401(k) and profit-sharing plans. To maintain full-time status employees must average twelve sea days a month on a quarterly basis.

### Q. Where are the jobs located?

A. Observers are trained in Woods Hole, MA, but are stationed in ports from Maine To N. Carolina. When offered a position in a training class, the candidate is offered a homeport. After training, the candidate sets up residence and makes trips out of the homeport. If requested to do a trip out of another port, travel expenses are reimbursed.

### Q. What is considered a sea day?

A. A sea day is a full day or any part of a day in which an observer is observing and collecting fishing data on board a fishing vessel.

### Q. How are sea days assigned?

A. On a monthly basis, NMFS requests A.I.S., Inc. to accomplish sea days by port, gear and fishery. AIS breaks these numbers down by Area Coordinator (AC) based at their port responsibilities. In turn, the AC assigns sea days to observers in a port based on gear and fishery. It is then the observer's responsibility to arrange trips with the fishermen in their ports.

### Q. How are land hours assigned?

A. Land hours are used to obtain sea days. Observers are paid land hours to set up trips, review their trip data and communicate with their Area Coordinator, Data Editor and with fishermen.



### Q. Are there safety issues involved with observing?

A. Safety is always a concern when going to sea and the Observer Program puts a high priority on safety training and safety protocols. Observers receive two days of safety training. They are issued safety equipment, including a float coat, a PFD, an immersion suit and a personal EPIRB. Observers conduct a safety inspection on each vessel before sailing and do not board if the vessel does not have a current USCG decal or if they consider the boat unsafe for any reason.

### Q. How do fishermen react to observers?

A. The vast majority of fishermen cooperate with the observer program. However, occasionally you may find a fisherman reluctant to take observers. It is part of the observer's skill-set to be able to convince/persuade captains that it is in their best interests to cooperate.

### Q. Do observers enforce fisheries regulations?

A. No. The observers' primary duty is to record scientific data.

### Q. What do we look for in observer candidates?

A. Beyond the minimum requirements, we look for candidates with some sea or fish experience. All observers will face rough seas at some time and seasickness can be a problem for some. Sea experience indicates their seaworthiness. Candidates with fisheries experience shows that they have an interest in pursuing a career in fisheries science or fisheries management.