



***New England Fishery
Management Council***

**U.S. Department of
Homeland Security
United States
Coast Guard**



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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NE Fishery Council and Coast Guard Encourage More Attention to Safety at Sea

With last month's closure of the fishing grounds known as the Nantucket Lightship Area to "general category" scallopers, a fleet comprised of small-scale or part-time vessels, New England Fishery Management Council and U.S. Coast Guard officials worry that boats that are not seaworthy or have not followed safety procedures may gear up to harvest the extremely valuable shellfish farther offshore.

Through an innovative management program developed by the Council, scallopers may take a limited amount of scallops from specific areas on Georges Bank that have been previously closed to protect rebuilding groundfish stocks. Scallopers are allowed to fish in two of these areas from June 15 through January 31, 2007. Because of good weather and the location of the Lightship Area, only 30 miles south of Nantucket, the general category fleet has used all of the 577 trips allocated to that group. General category vessels are also allocated 865 trips in Closed Area II, located more than 150 miles out on Georges Bank, although few trips have been taken there to date.

"Difficulties could arise if small vessels that are not equipped to handle heavy seas, especially during hurricane season, fish offshore to take advantage of prices that are now \$7 or more per pound," said Retired Coast Guard Captain and Council Executive Director Paul Howard. "We hope fishermen know their limits and take all precautions necessary," he added. "There are privileges and prestige associated with serving as captain of a vessel, but there are also burdens. The captain, and no one else, is responsible for the safety of his vessel and crew and that needs to be stressed."

The Coast Guard continues its quest in preventing loss of life in the commercial fishing industry by ensuring vessels are properly equipped and crews are prepared to respond to an emergency. Since January 30, fishing voyages have been terminated for boats fishing on the high seas in a hazardous state. Vessels with no firefighting capability, missing personal floatation devices for some crew members and expired equipment are some of the reasons vessels are being escorted back to the dock, regardless of distance offshore. Its message: not being properly prepared for a day at sea can be very costly and deadly. Fishermen may contact the nearest Coast Guard unit for a free, non-adversarial, dockside exam.

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