

Safe Harbor Policy

It is the policy of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to provide safe harbor to any commercial fishing vessel facing unsafe conditions at sea and to prevent the waste of edible seafood in their possession. This policy shall apply to any commercial fishing vessel in need of safe harbor and in possession of regulated species such as fish, lobsters, and sea scallops but not authorized to possess or land such species in Connecticut.

A commercial fishing vessel shall be granted safe harbor under the following declared circumstances:

Mechanical Breakdown: A vessel having a mechanical problem that makes the continuation of the voyage unsafe and poses risk to life and property under the prevailing weather conditions;

Unsafe weather conditions: A vessel facing an extended period of adverse weather conditions that makes the continuation of the voyage unsafe and poses risk to life and property;

Loss of essential equipment: A vessel losing essential safety related gear such as a life raft or EPIRB that renders the vessel unable to remain at sea safely.

Medical emergency: A member of the crew needs medical attention that necessitates landing at the nearest port.

Vessels seeking safe harbor have historically been rare events in the southern New England and Mid-Atlantic states. However, as the distributions of state quota managed species such as summer flounder and black sea bass have shifted north, vessels hailing from southern ports have increasingly sought opportunities to land large trip limits established for their states' in northern ports which are closer to the fishing grounds. States from New Jersey to Massachusetts are finding vessels in possession of state quota managed species such as summer flounder are disproportionately seeking safe harbor in their states. At certain times of year, a single North Carolina trip limit can equate to nearly 10 percent of Connecticut's annual quota. Since any state quota managed species landing in our state is charged against our state quota, it is imperative that we protect the interests of Connecticut fishermen while providing safe harbor to any vessel facing unsafe conditions at sea.

Procedure for commercial fishing vessels requesting safe harbor.

Any vessel seeking safe harbor under this policy shall call the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Division of State Environmental Conservation Police at 860-424-3333 and declare their intention to seek safe harbor under this policy. The declaration shall include an explanation of the nature of the problem, the port they intend to land in, and the approximate time of arrival.

Off-loading regulated species.

No person operating a vessel seeking safe harbor under this policy shall off load any regulated species unless authorized to do so by the Commissioner.

Vessels forced to remain at port for an extended period due to substantiated and unavoidable prolonged unsafe conditions may request the Commissioner authorize the off-loading of regulated species, provided the quantity of state quota managed species exceeding the prevailing Connecticut trip limit be forfeited to this state. Such forfeited fish shall be sold and the proceeds donated to a Connecticut food bank or similar charity.



Robert J. Klee, Commissioner

5/13/16
Date