



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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Bed Bug Detection and Mitigation for Observers

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: Bed Bugs

Bed bug (*Cimex lectularius*) populations have been increasing and spreading across the globe since the 1990s, and vessels at sea are not immune to this phenomenon. Characterized by feeding on human blood, usually at night, bed bugs typically cause a rash which can lead to itchiness, fever, fatigue, and mental distress.

The Solution: Vigilance

Once bed bugs are onboard a ship, they can be extremely difficult to exterminate. However, there are steps observers can take to detect and reduce the presence of bed bugs.

Where should I check?

You should check the bunk area, particularly the bedding and sleeping area, for signs of bed bug infestation. Mattress seams and crevices near your bunk are places where bed bugs often hide.

What should I look for?

- Bed bugs eggs look like tiny grains of rice.
- Bed bugs leave dark, grainy droppings that appear as dark spotting on bedding.
- Bed bugs can also leave cast-off husks from molting.

What should I do if I find signs of bed bugs in my assigned sleeping area?

If detected, you should document it and provide notice during your debriefing.

What do I tell the captain or vessel master?

If you find signs of bed bugs in your cabin and sleeping area, tell the captain what you found and share the tips below to reduce or eliminate the infestation.

What can I do to mitigate bed bugs in my sleeping area?

Getting rid of bed bugs is a constant effort, but there are several things you can do to reduce the presence of bed bugs:

- Vacuum the area, especially the crevices and seams.
- Place the mattress in a removable mattress cover.
- Treat the area with steam and/or insecticide if possible.
- Shake out infested bedding, and wash if possible.

What can I do to reduce bed bugs in my gear?

Just as with bedding, gear can also play host to bed bugs. To reduce the spread of bed bugs among gear, try to keep your gear stowed separately from others', in a plastic bin if possible. Controlling clutter is another step that will minimize potential habitats for bed bugs.

How do I make sure I don't bring bed bugs ashore?

Don't assume you need to throw out all your gear and bedding when you return home. Instead, continue to keep your gear separate from other belongings at your home before washing and heat-drying your laundry (and laundry bags). Continue to vacuum other items as needed, changing bags/filters in the vacuum as necessary and discarding them in tightly sealed plastic bags placed in outside trash bins.

