



New England Fishery Management Council

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New Voluntary Pilot Program to Pre-Measure/Tag Codends Now Underway; Designed to Assist Industry Compliance

The New England Fishery Management Council is pleased to announce the launch of a new Codend Compliance Assistance Program (CAP) that's designed to help fishermen document the purchase of legal-size codends and contribute to the collection of data on codend shrinkage rates. The program is in the pilot phase and participation is voluntary. It was developed by the Council's Enforcement Committee, which includes representatives from the U.S. Coast Guard and NOAA Office of Law Enforcement.

As fishermen well know, new nets tend to shrink or "harden" once exposed to routine fishing.

"It's just the nature of the material we use to build twine," said Terry Alexander, a commercial fisherman and New England Council member who chairs the Enforcement Committee.

The Enforcement Committee began working on the CAP roughly two years ago under the premise that fishermen who volunteered to have codends pre-measured and tagged would be recognized as program participants. Then, in the event that codend mesh inspected during subsequent Coast Guard boardings measured-out smaller than on the original purchase date, the fisherman's involvement in the CAP would be noted and possibly result in a "fix it" opportunity or reduced penalty.

"This is not a free ticket to tow illegal mesh," emphasized Alexander. "But if you're participating in the program and the Coast Guard boards your boat, it sends a signal that you're a responsible harvester and are trying to fish legally."

Pilot Phase Provisions

- The pilot phase is limited to 5-1/2", 6", and 6-1/2" mesh codends while the Council, Coast Guard, and NOAA assess how the program is working.
- Manufacturers provide dealers with standardized mesh. Fishermen must purchase codend mesh from a *participating* dealer who has a tag imprinter on site.
- The dealer affixes two stainless steel, tamper-proof tags onto the codend. The first tag is stamped with: (a) the date of purchase; and (b) the certified mesh size at the time of sale. The second tag contains the invoice number on the bill of sale.
- The participating fisherman carries a paper invoice onboard the vessel with the same information – date of purchase and mesh size at the time of sale – to present to the Coast Guard during boardings.



Measuring mesh. – Terry Alexander photo



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When the Coast Guard comes across nets that are part of the Codend Compliance Assistance Program, boarding officers will record the information imprinted on the steel tags and maintain this data along with other standard measurements. The measurements and tag information will be used to help determine the lifespan of codend mesh from the time of purchase until it begins to harden below the minimum size. NOAA Fisheries enforcement officials will be consulted along the way, and the Council's Enforcement Committee will continue working with NOAA's Office of General Counsel to consider whether modifications to the penalty schedule are warranted for vessels participating in the Codend CAP.

Reidar's Manufacturing Inc. in New Bedford, MA is the first participating dealer to join the Codend CAP. Also known as Reidar's Trawl-Scallop Gear and Marine Supply, the gear shop has a BAND-IT® tag imprinter on the grounds and is actively banding codends.

Terry Alexander said, "Now that we've launched the pilot program, we're hoping other dealers will come onboard and participate as well."

Capt. Kevin King represents the Coast Guard First District on the New England Council and serves on the Enforcement Committee.

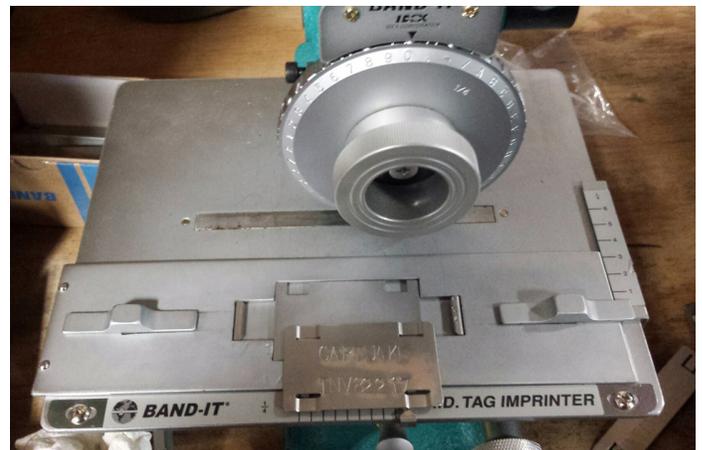
"The Coast Guard is happy to be a part of this initiative in cooperation with NOAA, the New England Council, and the fishing industry," Capt. King said. "We look forward to supporting this effort to help the fleet determine the impacts of hardening and maintenance on the life span of their codends."

The Enforcement Committee will monitor the CAP's progress to determine how long the pilot program should run.

The committee's long-term goal is to end up with a program that certifies codends for a defined period of time – possibly six or 12 months from the date of purchase – depending on what the data reveals during the pilot phase.

"Then the Coast Guard will be able to focus on egregious violators, like the guys who tow net liners and really do damage to the resource," Alexander concluded.

For more information, contact Lou Goodreau, the Council's lead Enforcement Committee staffer, at (978) 465-0492 ext. 115, lgoodreau@nefmc.org.



An imprinter (top) stamps two stainless steel bands per codend – one with the purchase date and certified mesh size at the time of sale; and the other with the invoice number. The codend pictured above is constructed with 6-1/2" mesh and tagged. – Tor Bendiksen photos