



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

INCIDENTAL HARASSMENT AUTHORIZATION

The University of Texas at Austin (UT) is hereby authorized under section 101(a)(5)(D) of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA; 16 U.S.C. 1371(a)(5)(D)) to incidentally harass marine mammals, under the following conditions:

1. This incidental harassment authorization (IHA) is valid for one year from the date of issuance.
2. This IHA is valid only for geophysical survey activity in coastal waters off Texas in the NW Gulf of Mexico, as specified in UT's IHA application.
3. General Conditions
 - (a) A copy of this IHA must be in the possession of UT, the vessel operator, the lead protected species observer (PSO), and any other relevant designees of UT operating under the authority of this IHA.
 - (b) The species and/or stocks authorized for taking are listed in Table 1. Authorized take, by Level B harassment only, is limited to the species and/or stocks and numbers listed in Table 1.
 - (c) The taking by Level A harassment, serious injury or death of any of the species listed in Table 1 or any taking of any other species of marine mammal is prohibited and may result in the modification, suspension, or revocation of this IHA. Any taking exceeding the authorized numbers listed in Table 1 is prohibited and may result in the modification, suspension, or revocation of this IHA.
 - (d) During use of the acoustic source, if any marine mammal species or stock not listed in Table 1 appear within or enter the Level B harassment zone (Table 2) the acoustic source must be shut down.
 - (e) UT must ensure that relevant vessel personnel and the PSO team participate in a joint onboard briefing led by the vessel operator and lead PSO to ensure that responsibilities, communication procedures, marine mammal monitoring protocols, operational procedures, and IHA requirements are clearly understood.
4. Mitigation Requirements
 - a. UT must use independent, dedicated, trained visual PSOs, meaning that the PSOs must be employed by a third-party observer provider, must not have tasks other than to conduct observational effort, collect data, and communicate with and instruct relevant vessel crew with regard to the presence of marine mammals and mitigation requirements (including



brief alerts regarding maritime hazards), and must have successfully completed an approved PSO training course.

- b. At least one visual PSO must have a minimum of 90 days at-sea experience working in those roles, respectively, during a shallow penetration seismic survey, with no more than 18 months elapsed since the conclusion of the at-sea experience.
- c. Visual Observation
 - i. During survey operations (e.g., any day on which use of the airgun array is planned to occur and whenever the airgun array is in the water, whether activated or not), a minimum of two PSOs must be on duty and conducting visual observations at all times during daylight hours (i.e., from 30 minutes prior to sunrise through 30 minutes following sunset) and 30 minutes prior to and during ramp-up of the airgun array. To the maximum extent practicable, two PSOs must be on duty at all times during daylight hours.
 - ii. Visual monitoring of the pre-start clearance zone and, to the extent practicable, the Level B harassment zone (Table 2) must begin no less than 30 minutes prior to ramp-up and must continue until one hour after use of the airgun array ceases or until 30 minutes past sunset.
 - iii. Visual PSOs must coordinate to ensure 360° visual coverage around the vessel from the most appropriate observation posts, and must conduct visual observations using binoculars and the naked eye while free from distractions and in a consistent, systematic, and diligent manner.
 - iv. During good conditions (e.g., daylight hours; Beaufort sea state (BSS) 3 or less), visual PSOs must conduct observations when the airgun array is not operating for comparison of sighting rates and behavior with and without use of the airgun array and between acquisition periods, to the maximum extent practicable.
 - v. Visual PSOs may be on watch for a maximum of four consecutive hours followed by a break of at least one hour between watches and may conduct a maximum of 12 hours of observation per 24-hour period.
- d. Pre-start clearance and Ramp-up
 - i. A ramp-up procedure must be followed at all times as part of the activation of the airgun array, except as described under 4(d)(viii).
 - ii. The operator must notify a designated PSO of the planned start of ramp-up as agreed upon with the lead PSO. The notification time should not be less than 60 minutes prior to the planned ramp-up in order to allow the PSOs time to monitor the shutdown and buffer zone for 30 minutes prior to the initiation of ramp-up.

- iii. Ramp-ups shall be scheduled so as to minimize the time spent with the source activated prior to reaching the designated run-in.
 - iv. One of the PSOs conducting the pre-start clearance observations must be notified again immediately prior to initiating ramp-up procedures and the operator must receive confirmation from the PSOs to proceed.
 - v. The pre-start clearance zone is defined as follows: for all marine mammals listed in Table 1, the pre-start clearance zone encompasses the area at and below the sea surface out to a radius of 200 meters from the edges of the acoustic source.
 - vi. Ramp-up must not be initiated if any marine mammal is within the pre-start clearance zone. If a marine mammal is observed within the pre-start clearance zone during the 30 minute pre-start clearance period, ramp-up may not begin until the animal(s) has been observed exiting the zone or until an additional time period has elapsed with no further sightings (15 minutes for small delphinids belonging to the genera of *Steno*, *Stenella*, or *Tursiops*, and 30 minutes for all other species).
 - vii. Ramp-up must begin by activating one GI airgun for no less than 5 minutes and then activating the second airgun. The operator must provide information to the PSO documenting that appropriate procedures were followed.
 - viii. If the airgun array is shut down for brief periods (i.e., less than 30 minutes) for reasons other than that described for shutdown (e.g., mechanical difficulty), it may be activated again without ramp-up if PSOs have maintained constant observation and no detections of marine mammals have occurred within the pre-start clearance zone. For any longer shutdown, pre-start clearance observation and ramp-up are required. For any shutdown at night or in periods of poor visibility (e.g., BSS 4 or greater), ramp-up is required, but if the shutdown period was brief and constant observation was maintained, pre-start clearance watch is not required.
 - ix. Testing of the airgun array involving all elements requires ramp-up. Testing limited to individual source elements or strings does not require ramp-up but does require pre-start clearance watch.
- e. Shutdown requirements
- i. Any PSO on duty has the authority to delay the start of survey operations or to call for shutdown of the airgun array.
 - ii. The operator must establish and maintain clear lines of communication directly between PSOs on duty and crew controlling the airgun array to ensure that shutdown commands are conveyed swiftly while allowing PSOs to maintain watch.
 - iii. Shutdown of the array is required upon observation of a species for which authorization has not been granted or a species for which authorization has been

granted but the authorized number of takes has been met, approaching or observed within any harassment zone (Table 2).

f. Vessel strike avoidance

- i. Vessel operators and crew must maintain a vigilant watch for all marine mammals and slow down, stop their vessel, or alter course, as appropriate and regardless of vessel size, to avoid striking any marine mammals. A visual observer aboard the vessel must monitor a vessel strike avoidance zone around the vessel (separation distances stated below). Visual observers monitoring the vessel strike avoidance zone may be third-party observers (i.e., PSOs) or crew members, but crew members responsible for these duties must be provided sufficient training to 1) distinguish marine mammals from other phenomena and 2) broadly to identify a marine mammal to taxonomic group (i.e., as a large whale, or other marine mammal).
- ii. Vessel speeds must be reduced to 10 knots or less when mother/calf pairs, pods, or large assemblages of cetaceans are observed near a vessel.
- iii. The vessel must maintain a minimum separation distance of 500 m from baleen whales. If a baleen whale is sighted within the relevant separation distance, the vessel must steer a course away at 10 knots or less until the 500-m separation distance is established. If a whale is observed but cannot be confirmed as a species other than a baleen whale, the vessel operator must assume that it is a baleen whale and take appropriate action.
- iv. The vessel must maintain a minimum separation distance of 100 m from sperm whales.
- v. The vessel must, to the maximum extent practicable, attempt to maintain a minimum separation distance of 50 m from all other marine mammals, with an understanding that at times this may not be possible (e.g., for animals that approach the vessel).
- vi. When marine mammals are sighted while a vessel is underway, the vessel must take action as necessary to avoid violating the relevant separation distance (e.g., attempt to remain parallel to the animal's course, avoid excessive speed or abrupt changes in direction until the animal has left the area). If marine mammals are sighted within the relevant separation distance, the vessel must reduce speed and shift the engine to neutral, not engaging the engines until animals are clear of the area. This does not apply to any vessel towing gear or any vessel that is navigationally constrained.

5. Monitoring Requirements

- a. The operator must work with the selected third-party observer provider to ensure PSOs have all equipment (including backup equipment) needed to adequately perform necessary tasks, including accurate determination of distance and bearing to observed marine mammals. Such equipment, at a minimum, must include:

- i. Reticle binoculars (e.g., 7 x 50) of appropriate quality (at least one per PSO, plus backups).
 - ii. Global Positioning Unit (GPS) (plus backup).
 - iii. Digital single-lens reflex cameras of appropriate quality that capture photographs and video (plus backup).
 - iv. Compass (plus backup)
 - v. Radios for communication among vessel crew and PSOs (at least one per PSO, plus backups).
 - vi. Any other tools necessary to adequately perform necessary PSO tasks.
- b. Protected Species Observers Qualifications
- i. PSOs must have successfully completed an acceptable PSO training course.
 - ii. NMFS must review and approve PSO resumes.
 - iii. One visual PSO with experience as shown in 4(b) shall be designated as the lead for the PSO team. The lead must coordinate duty schedules and roles for the PSO team and serve as primary point of contact for the vessel operator. (Note that the responsibility of coordinating duty schedules and roles may instead be assigned to a shore-based, third-party monitoring coordinator.) To the maximum extent practicable, the lead PSO must devise the duty schedule such that experienced PSOs are on duty with those PSOs with appropriate training but who have not yet gained relevant experience.
 - iv. PSOs must successfully complete relevant training, including completion of all required coursework and passing (80 percent or greater) a written and/or oral examination developed for the training program.
 - v. PSOs must have successfully attained a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university with a major in one of the natural sciences, a minimum of 30 semester hours or equivalent in the biological sciences, and at least one undergraduate course in math or statistics.
 - vi. The educational requirements may be waived if the PSO has acquired the relevant skills through alternate experience. Requests for such a waiver must be submitted to NMFS and must include written justification. Requests must be granted or denied (with justification) by NMFS within one week of receipt of submitted information. Alternate experience that may be considered includes, but is not limited to (1) secondary education and/or experience comparable to PSO duties; (2) previous work experience conducting academic, commercial, or government-sponsored marine

mammal surveys; or (3) previous work experience as a PSO; the PSO should demonstrate good standing and consistently good performance of PSO duties.

c. Data Collection

- i. PSOs must use standardized electronic data collection forms. PSOs must record detailed information about any implementation of mitigation requirements, including the distance of animals to the airgun array and description of specific actions that ensued, the behavior of the animal(s), any observed changes in behavior before and after implementation of mitigation, and if shutdown was implemented, the length of time before any subsequent ramp-up of the airgun array. If required mitigation was not implemented, PSOs should record a description of the circumstances.
- ii. At a minimum, the following information must be recorded:
 1. Vessel name, vessel size and type, maximum speed capability of vessel;
 2. Dates (MM/DD/YYYY) of departures and returns to port with port name;
 3. PSO names and affiliations, PSO ID (initials or other identifier);
 4. Date (MM/DD/YYYY) and participants of PSO briefings (as discussed in General Requirement);
 5. Visual monitoring equipment used (description);
 6. PSO location on vessel and height (meters) of observation location above water surface;
 7. Watch status (description);
 8. Dates (MM/DD/YYYY) and times (Greenwich Mean Time/UTC) of survey on/off effort and times (GMC/UTC) corresponding with PSO on/off effort;
 9. Vessel location (decimal degrees) when survey effort began and ended and vessel location at beginning and end of visual PSO duty shifts;
 10. Vessel location (decimal degrees) at 30-second intervals if obtainable from data collection software, otherwise at a practical regular interval;
 11. Vessel heading (compass heading) and speed (knots) at beginning and end of visual PSO duty shifts and upon any change;
 12. Water depths (meters) (if obtainable from data collection software);

13. Environmental conditions while on visual survey (at beginning and end of PSO shift and whenever conditions changed significantly), including BSS and any other relevant weather conditions including cloud cover, fog, sun glare, and overall visibility to the horizon;
 14. Factors that may have contributed to impaired observations during each PSO shift change or as needed as environmental conditions changed (description) (e.g., vessel traffic, equipment malfunctions); and
 15. Vessel/survey activity information (and changes thereof) (description), such as airgun array power output while in operation, number and volume of airguns operating in the array, tow depth of the array, and any other notes of significance (i.e., pre-start clearance, ramp-up, shutdown, testing, shooting, ramp-up completion, end of operations, streamers, etc.).
- iii. Upon visual observation of any marine mammals, the following information must be recorded:
1. Sighting ID (numeric);
 2. Watch status (sighting made by PSO on/off effort, opportunistic, crew, alternate vessel/platform);
 3. Location of PSO/observer (description);
 4. Vessel activity at the time of the sighting (*e.g.*, deploying, recovering, testing, shooting, data acquisition, other);
 5. PSO who sighted the animal/ID;
 6. Time/date of sighting (GMT/UTC, MM/DD/YYYY);
 7. Initial detection method (description);
 8. Sighting cue (description);
 9. Vessel location at time of sighting (decimal degrees);
 10. Water depth (meters);
 11. Direction of vessel's travel (compass direction);
 12. Speed (knots) of the vessel from which the observation was made;
 13. Direction of animal's travel relative to the vessel (description, compass heading);
 14. Bearing to sighting (degrees);

15. Identification of the animal (*e.g.*, genus/species, lowest possible taxonomic level, or unidentified) and the composition of the group if there is a mix of species;
16. Species reliability (an indicator of confidence in identification)
(1=unsure/possible, 2=probable, 3=definite/sure, 9=unknown/not recorded);
17. Estimated distance to the animal (meters) and method of estimating distance;
18. Estimated number of animals (high/low/best) (numeric);
19. Estimated number of animals by cohort (adults, yearlings, juveniles, calves, group composition, etc.);
20. Description (as many distinguishing features as possible of each individual seen, including length, shape, color, pattern, scars or markings, shape and size of dorsal fin, shape of head, and blow characteristics);
21. Detailed behavior observations (*e.g.*, number of blows/breaths, number of surfaces, breaching, spyhopping, diving, feeding, traveling; as explicit and detailed as possible; note any observed changes in behavior);
22. Animal's closest point of approach (CPA) (meters) and/or closest distance from any element of the airgun array;
23. Description of any actions implemented in response to the sighting (*e.g.*, delays, shutdown, ramp-up) and time and location of the action.
24. Photos (Yes/No);
25. Photo Frame Numbers (list of numbers); and
26. Conditions at a time of sighting (*e.g.*, visibility, BSS)

6. Reporting

- (a) UT must submit a draft comprehensive report to NMFS on all activities and monitoring results within 90 days of the completion of the survey or expiration of the IHA, whichever comes sooner. A final report must be submitted within 30 days following resolution of any comments on the draft report. If no comments are received from NMFS within 30 calendar days of receipt of the draft report, the report shall be considered final. The draft report must include the following:
 - (i) Summary of all activities conducted and sightings of marine mammals near the activities;
 - (ii) Summary of all data required to be collected (see condition 5(c));

- (iii) Full documentation of methods, results, and interpretation pertaining to all monitoring;
 - (iv) Summary of dates and locations of survey operations (including (1) the number of days on which the airgun array was active and (2) the percentage of time and total time the array was active during daylight vs. nighttime hours (including dawn and dusk)) and all marine mammal sightings (dates, times, locations, activities, associated survey activities);
 - (v) Geo-referenced time-stamped vessel tracklines for all time periods during which airguns were operating. Tracklines should include points recording any change in airgun status (e.g., when the airguns began operating, when they were turned off, or when they changed from full array to single gun or vice versa);
 - (vi) GIS files in ESRI shapefile format and UTC date and time, latitude in decimal degrees, and longitude in decimal degrees. All coordinates must be referenced to the WGS84 geographic coordinate system; and
 - (vii) Raw observational data.
- (b) Reporting Injured or Dead Marine Mammals
- (i) Discovery of Injured or Dead Marine Mammal – In the event that personnel involved in the survey activities covered by the authorization discover an injured or dead marine mammal, UT must report the incident to the Office of Protected Resources (OPR) (PR.ITP.MonitoringReports@noaa.gov) as soon as feasible. The report must include the following information:
 1. Time, date, and location (latitude/longitude) of the first discovery (and updated location information if known and applicable);
 2. Species identification (if known) or description of the animal(s) involved;
 3. Condition of the animal(s) (including carcass condition if the animal is dead);
 4. Observed behaviors of the animal(s), if alive;
 5. If available, photographs or video footage of the animal(s); and
 6. General circumstances under which the animal was discovered.
 - (ii) Vessel Strike – In the event of a ship strike of a marine mammal by any vessel involved in the activities covered by the authorization, UT must report the incident to Office of Protected Resources (OPR) (PR.ITP.MonitoringReports@noaa.gov), NMFS, and the NMFS Southeast Regional Stranding Coordinator (305-361-4586) as soon as feasible. The report must include the following information:

1. Time, date, and location (latitude/longitude) of the incident;
 2. Species identification (if known) or description of the animal(s) involved;
 3. Vessel's speed during and leading up to the incident;
 4. Vessel's course/heading and what operations were being conducted (if applicable);
 5. Status of all sound sources in use;
 6. Description of avoidance measures/requirements that were in place at the time of the strike and what additional measures were taken, if any, to avoid strike;
 7. Environmental conditions (e.g., wind speed and direction, Beaufort sea state, cloud cover, visibility) immediately preceding the strike;
 8. Estimated size and length of animal that was struck;
 9. Description of the behavior of the marine mammal immediately preceding and following the strike;
 10. If available, description of the presence and behavior of any other marine mammals immediately preceding the strike;
 11. Estimated fate of the animal (e.g., dead, injured but alive, injured and moving, blood or tissue observed in the water, status unknown, disappeared); and
 12. To the extent practicable, photographs or video footage of the animal(s).
7. This Authorization may be modified, suspended or revoked if the holder fails to abide by the conditions prescribed herein (including, but not limited to, failure to comply with monitoring or reporting requirements), or if NMFS determines: (1) the authorized taking is likely to have or is having more than a negligible impact on the species or stocks of affected marine mammals, or (2) the prescribed measures are likely not or are not effecting the least practicable adverse impact on the affected species or stocks and their habitat.
8. Renewals

On a case-by-case basis, NMFS may issue a one-time, one-year Renewal IHA following notice to the public providing an additional 15 days for public comments when (1) up to another year of identical, or nearly identical, activities are planned or (2) the specified activities would not be completed by the time this IHA expires and a Renewal would allow for completion of the activities, provided all of the following conditions are met:

- (a) A request for renewal is received no later than 60 days prior to the needed Renewal IHA effective date (the Renewal IHA expiration date cannot extend beyond one year from expiration of this IHA).
- (b) The request for renewal must include the following:
 - (i) An explanation that the activities to be conducted under the requested Renewal IHA are identical to the activities analyzed for this IHA, are a subset of the activities, or include changes so minor that the changes do not affect the previous analyses, mitigation and monitoring requirements, or take estimates (with the exception of reducing the type or amount of take).
 - (ii) A preliminary monitoring report showing the results of the required monitoring to date and an explanation showing that the monitoring results do not indicate impacts of a scale or nature not previously analyzed or authorized.
- (c) Upon review of the request for Renewal, the status of the affected species or stocks, and any other pertinent information, NMFS determines that there are no more than minor changes in the activities, the mitigation and monitoring measures will remain the same and appropriate, and the findings made in support of this IHA remain valid.

For Kimberly Damon-Randall,
Director, Office of Protected Resources,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

Table 1. Authorized take numbers, by species

Species	Authorized Take by Level B Harassment
Atlantic spotted dolphin (<i>Stenella frontalis</i>)	26
Bottlenose dolphin (<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>)	1,309
Rough-toothed dolphin (<i>Steno bredanensis</i>)	14

Table 2. Modeled Radial Distances (m) to Isopleths Corresponding to Level A and Level B Harassment Thresholds.

Airgun configuration	Level A harassment zone (m)	Level B harassment zone (m)
	HF cetaceans	
2 airgun array (210 in ³)	1.5	1,750