UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Northeast Fisheries Science Center
166 Water Street
Woods Hole, MA 02543-1026

March 28, 2013

MEMORANDUM FOR: A.I.S., Inc.,
East West Technical Services,
Fathoms Research LLC, and
MRAG Americas
At-Sea Monitors, Industry Funded Scallop Observers, and
Northeast Fisheries Observer Program Observers

FROM: Amy S. Van Atten
Branch Chief, Fisheries Sampling Branch (FSB)

SUBJECT: Incidental Takes and Personal Protective Equipment

To all observers, monitors and providers,

Since the recorded outbreak of influenza virus H3N8 in a population of harbor seals along the northern New England coast in September 2011, the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program (MMHSRP) has been conducting ongoing research concerning the prevalence and spread of influenza in marine mammals. Though there have been strains of influenza discovered in other species of seal, and a couple cetacean species, the current emphasis is on harbor seals in the Northeast. While human infection is rare, there is one documented case of conjunctivitis in a worker exposed to an experimentally infected seal in 1981. Please do not take these Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements lightly as it is always important to be properly prepared to sample these animals.

Over a year has passed and the MMHSRP recently hosted a seminar issuing an updated reminder regarding PPE when dealing with these animals one on one. The influenza virus is spread via respiratory, oral and fecal pathways, and viral exposure via inhalation, contact with eyes, mouth and open wounds are always possible. **It is also important to keep in mind that the virus may be transferred on clothing and shoes** (especially important for those with pets). Suggestions for cleaning and inactivating the virus include exposure to environments of temperatures greater than 140°F or pH less than 2.0. The incubation period for influenza in water is days at 68-86°F, weeks at 50°F and months at 14-32°F.

****The minimum requirement for PPE when dealing with these animals are gloves, rubber boots or closed footwear, slickers/oilers and protective eyewear (ex. sunglasses).****

In order to satisfy these PPE requirements, we have ordered, and will be issuing to each observer, plastic face shields to be used in the field when interacting with marine mammal takes, in lieu of sunglasses. These face shields are intended to provide additional protection when conducting NEFOP sampling protocols that involve obtaining tissue samples and manipulating dead mammals when reporting on animal condition.

Currently, MMHSRP staff are in the process of contacting the stranding network services and are promoting discussions among the network facilities, state public health officials and CDC for follow-up questionnaires and monitoring. Should you have any additional questions or concerns regarding this notification, please do not hesitate to contact Bill Greer William.Greer@noaa.gov or Kathryn Roy Kathryn.Roy@noaa.gov who will be glad to provide any supplemental details.

As always, we thank you for all of your hard work and dedication to marine mammal sampling aspect of the observer/monitoring programs.

Attachment: none