



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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Marine Fisheries Advisory

Reminder on Buoy Line Marking, Configuration and Compliance Assistance for Commercial Lobster, Fish Pot, and Conch Pot Fishers

With trap fisheries beginning to open up throughout the state, this advisor serves as a reminder to commercial fishers about the various buoy line configuration and marking rules for trap/pot gear. These rules apply to all commercial lobster/crab trap gear, fish pots, and conch pots. Their purpose is to reduce the risk of potential entanglements with whales and make our gear uniquely identifiable should an entanglement occur.

Buoy Line Configuration

All commercial trap/pot gear set in Massachusetts waters must be rigged with a buoy line that does not exceed 3/8" diameter and with a tensile strength of 1,700 pounds or less. This should allow the buoy line to part if a whale encounters it. There are several common ways to comply with this requirement. First, you can use [approved fully formed weak rope](#) and there are several varieties of this rope that are available for general distribution. Alternatively, in the top 75% of your buoy line you can insert an [approved 1,700 lb weak contrivance](#) once every 60' feet. Approved weak contrivances include three-foot inserts of weak rope spliced into the buoy line; inline plastic breakaways; and three-foot long sections of the "South Shore" sleeve. To maximize the utility of these contrivances, DMF advises you do not place them in the top 12' of the buoy line ("surface system") adjacent to the buoy but rather below the surface system in the so-called body of the buoy line. Please note that 600-pound weak link at the buoy is no longer required but may still be used.

Buoy Line Marking

All commercial trap/pot gear set in Massachusetts waters must also be marked with at least five red marks. If you are fishing with a buoy line that is red or candy cane colored (red and white), then all the marks must be white. A three-foot solid mark must be present in the surface system. Solid marks are typically composed of materials such as tape, paint, or heat shrink tubing; non-solid marking materials such as twine or zip ties are not compliant in the surface system. In the body of the buoy line below, at least four additional two-foot red marks are required with two marks in the top 50%, two marks in the bottom 50% and no more than 60 feet between red marks. These marks in the body of the buoy line may be solid (e.g., paint, tape, heat shrink tube) or non-solid (e.g., twine, zip ties). Additionally, if you are using South Shore Sleeves with a red tracer or three-foot lengths of red or candy cane weak as your weak contrivances in the body of the buoy line, these contrivances can also double as a red mark.

In recent years, rope manufacturers have developed fully-formed weak rope with Tyvek tracers woven throughout the line. The use of weak rope with the “MASS LOBSTER” tracer is authorized to comply with both the 1,700-pound buoy line breaking strength requirement and the non-solid marking requirements for the body of the buoy line. However, a solid (e.g., paint, tape, heat shrink tube) three-foot surface mark in the surface system is still required. If you are fishing with a rope that is red or candy cane color, then this solid mark must be white, for all other rope this mark should be red.

The purpose of the solid-colored surface system marking requirement is to make the source of the gear potentially identifiable from aerial platforms, whereas the non-solid marking requirement in the body of the buoy line can help identify the source of the gear when examined after disentanglement and gear collection.

DMF recognizes that our February 2025 advisory on this subject contained some incorrect information regarding surface system marking requirements. We have subsequently further consulted with NOAA Fisheries to resolve these issues and are issuing this advisory to replace and correct the prior document. We apologize for the inconvenience or confusion this may have caused. DMF is dedicated to working with industry to assist in compliance.

Buoy Line Configuration and Marking in Federal Waters

Please note that there are different buoy line configuration and marking requirements for Massachusetts’ trap/pot fishers fishing in federal waters. Lobster and Jonah crab trap fishers should consult NOAA Fisheries’ [Massachusetts Summary Guide](#) for complete rules. Similarly, conch pot and fish pot fishers fishing in the federal zone should consult NOAA’ Fisheries [Northeast Trap Pot Fisheries Guide](#) for federal rules governing Other Trap Pot Fishers in the Northern Nearshore Trap/Pot Waters (see pages 30-35).

Compliance Assistance

DMF is working to provide fishermen with complaint weak contrivance, weak rope, and buoy line marking materials free of charge. These materials are routinely available at both field stations in Gloucester and New Bedford. Please reach out to protected species gear specialist, David Chosid (david.chosid@mass.gov; 857-393-4026) to coordinate.

Additionally, the Massachusetts Lobstermen’s Association (MLA), in coordination with DMF, is hosting a “Gear Distribution Day” on April 29 from 10AM to 2PM at their office located at 8 Otis Place, Scituate, MA. If the April 29 event is rained out, then the event will occur at the same time and place on April 30. Please contact MLA at 781-545-6984 for more information about this event.

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