Coast Guard warns shrimpers not to remove TEDs

By The Associated Press

GRAND ISLE — Shrimpers who remove turtle excluder devices from their nets as part of a protest will face the usual fines and penalties, the Coast Guard says.

Members of the Concerned Shrimpers of America, a group that has objected to mandatory use of the devices, have said they plan to remove the gear during a protest Friday off Grand Isle.

Shrimpers say the devices, designed to protect endangered sea turtles from drowning, have reduced their catches. They also contend that there are not enough sea turtles in Louisiana waters to justify using the gear.

“Our position is the Coast Guard enforces the laws 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, and this is really no different,” said Lt. Peter Seaman, a Coast Guard spokesman.

The penalty for a first offense can be a fine of $8,000 to $12,000 for the boat captain and owner, according to the Coast Guard. Repeat offenders could be fined up to $25,000 and have their boats and gear seized.

But officials connected with a fishing rodeo here, at which time the protest is scheduled, said the demonstration may be canceled.

Grand Isle Mayor Andy Valence said he talked to shrimpers during the July 3 meeting and thought the issue had been put aside. Fishermen decided demonstrations at the rodeo would not be a part of their fight against the excluders, he said.