
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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The NHDES Boat Inspection Program

Keeping Sewage and Greywater Out of New Hampshire Lakes

As part of our ongoing efforts to ensure clean lakes, and as a free service to boat owners, NHDES conducts boat inspections for freshwater vessels with onboard wastewater containment facilities. This program focuses on Lakes Winnepesaukee and Winnisquam, where a high percentage of large boats with wastewater containment systems are located.



Please request a boat inspection! Particularly if your boat is new to you or new to the area or if it has never been inspected before – getting an inspection verifies compliance with no discharge regulations. Schedule an inspection by emailing CVA@des.nh.gov, by calling NHDES, or by personal request when a NHDES inspector is on site.

What to Expect During a Boat Inspection

- Inspections are completely free, there is never a charge for inspection and tips are not accepted.
- Inspections take about 20 minutes on average.
- Inspection isn't optional; all boats on New Hampshire waters are subject to these inspections.
- You do NOT need to be present for the inspection unless you so choose. If you are not going to be present, make sure the inspector has access to all of the boat's plumbing.
- The inspector checks all onboard facilities that are designed to receive or hold sewage or greywater, including sinks, showers, holding tanks, valves and plumbing. Starting at the various receiving fixtures, the plumbing is traced to the final onboard holding tank(s).
 - **There may be no means of overboard discharge, either directly or indirectly** (RSA 487:2). Waste must be removed from boat holding tanks at pumpout stations.
- Boat registration and statistical data are collected.
- If found in compliance, the boat is identified with an NHDES decal.
- If the boat is not in compliance, the corrective measures are outlined and a schedule is agreed upon for re-inspection.
 - New Hampshire law currently provides for fines and loss of boat registration if a boater refuses to take corrective measures in a timely manner!

Please note: Inspections occur only during the summer months – June, July and August – and typically only on weekends. If you have a question about boat inspections or questions regarding boat wastewater, please email CVA@des.nh.gov or call (603) 271-8803.

History

The state of New Hampshire has regulated boat sewage for over 60 years. Concerns about potential health risks and water quality degradation caused by boats discharging untreated sewage into state waters prompted the New Hampshire Legislature to enact a law to require treatment devices on marine toilets in 1957. While these macerator/chlorinator devices reduced fecal bacteria levels, they did not remove nutrients and organic material, which can degrade water quality over time. **The law was amended in 1967 to prohibit any sewage discharge from boats** (currently RSA 487:2, Marine Toilets and Disposal of Sewage from Boats). The law also contained provisions for enforcement by water pollution inspectors.

Since many boats are still manufactured with overboard discharge systems, New Hampshire sought special status under the federal Clean Water Act to designate all of the waters of the state as a “no-discharge” zone. In 1975, **New Hampshire was the first state to have this status granted**, establishing more stringent requirements for vessels brought to our lakes.

To prevent further degradation of water quality, the state passed an amendment to prohibit the discharge of sink and shower waste (greywater) as part of the “no-discharge” standard. The amendment also added the provision that **“no person shall knowingly launch into fresh waters of the state any boat which is not equipped in compliance with the provisions of this chapter.”**

Program Goals

Educate the boating public about proper disposal of human waste and greywater. Since the “no-discharge” law applies to all boats, regardless of the state where they are registered, educating both in-state and out-of-state boaters about New Hampshire’s strict “no-discharge” law is critical to the protection of the state’s fresh waters. NHDES encourages marinas, boating clubs and groups, and the boating fraternity to help spread the word about proper management of boat wastewater and its importance for protecting water quality.

Maintain excellent water quality in New Hampshire’s lakes. New Hampshire takes pride in the high quality of its lakes; however, improper disposal of boat waste is a significant threat to lake quality. Boat wastewater contains nutrients that promote the growth of cyanobacteria and algae while providing the necessary elements to increase native and invasive aquatic plant growth. Keeping our lakes free from these sources of pollution is an important goal of the Boat Inspection Program.

Provide for public health by ensuring that discharges from boats are not occurring in lakes. In addition to deteriorating lake quality, the discharge of human waste and greywater to lakes creates a significant health hazard. A number of diseases including cholera and hepatitis are water-borne and can be transmitted from human waste to those recreating in the waters. Similarly, greywater from sinks and showers may also contain harmful concentrations of microorganisms.

Let’s all do our part to keep New Hampshire’s lakes clean!

Please contact NHDES by email at CVA@des.nh.gov or by phone at (603) 271-8803 if you have any questions about this or other related programs. For more information on the inspection program and other related topics, visit <http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wmb/cva/index.htm>.

For more information on the federal No Discharge Zones visit <https://www.epa.gov/vessels-marinas-and-ports/no-discharge-zones-ndzs-state>.