
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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Boat Washing and Engine Maintenance for Boat Owners

Recreational boating provides a great opportunity to enjoy New Hampshire's lakes, ponds, rivers, and marine waters. However, with this comes a responsibility to protect water quality. The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) encourages boat owners to follow boating best management practices (BMPs) to protect water quality when cleaning and maintaining their boat, whether they utilize the services of a marina or perform these services themselves.

Most people probably think of wastewater as sewage water, but in New Hampshire if products or pollutants mix with water this can result in water becoming wastewater. Soapy water, or water containing any grease or oils, can be wastewater. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and NHDES regulate discharges of pollution. NHDES' authority to enforce discharges into state waters is provided by the following law:

Section 485-A:13

1. (a) "It shall be unlawful for any person or persons to discharge or dispose of any sewage or waste [wash water, antifreeze and detergents] to the surface water or groundwater of the state without first obtaining a written permit from the department of environmental services ..."

This means that careful measures must be taken by marina facilities and boat owners to prevent discharges from boating related activities including boat washing and maintenance.

Boat Cleaning Procedures

If you bring your boat to a marina to be washed, you should inquire whether they are in compliance with the current permit requirements for capturing the wastewater. This typically includes writing and following a pollution prevention program plan that details the processes used for capturing wastewater and stormwater to make sure it does NOT drain directly into the lake or pond. You should ask where the marina washes boats at their facility and what system(s) they have in place for minimizing pollution to surface waters.

If you wash your boat yourself, you are strongly encouraged to follow these boat washing procedures:

- Do not the wash or rinse water to drain directly to any surface water.
- When possible, boat washing should take place in an area that collects and sends all associated water and detergents to an approved and permitted private or public wastewater collection and treatment system.
- For individual boat owners where boat washing occurs in an area that does not drain to a wastewater collection system, all associated wash water should soak directly into the ground. NHDES does not issue permits to individual boat owners for cleaning purposes. However, the boat owner assumes responsibility for any pollutant violations to surface or groundwater that may result from their activities.

- When boat washing is taking place over dry ground, remove all drain plugs so that the water can drain out of the boat during and after the wash process.
- Carefully read the label prior to purchase of any cleaning product and review the ingredients included.
 - Use only phosphate-free detergents. RSA 485-A:56 prohibits the sale or distribution of household cleansing products that contain phosphorus compounds.
 - Do not use detergents containing ammonia, sodium hypochlorite (bleach), chlorinated solvents, petroleum distillates, strong acids, or lye (especially in places where they could be released to the water.)
- Don't be fooled by so-called "biodegradable" products. They are not always environmentally friendly and sometimes biodegradable means that they break down faster and more quickly release nutrients and other pollutants to the environment.
- Consider using only water, which may actually be all you need to complete the job.
- Bilge areas must be cleaned, drained, and dried prior to next use to minimize the introduction of invasive species.
- Consult the [EPA Safe Choice website](#) to obtain a list of products that meet the Safe Choice standard.

If the boat must be cleaned while in the water, add these additional guidelines:

- If possible, use only water for cleaning.
- Never use any detergents or other cleaning agents on the outside of the boat.
- Detergents and cleaning agents used inside the boat must be removed using absorbent materials and properly disposed or washed into a holding tank aboard the boat (holding tank must then be pumped out and cannot be drained to surface water.)
- In-water bottom (hull) cleaning is primarily reserved for boats that remain in saltwater for an extended period. Only physical methods (scrubbing, scraping) for the removal of algae and barnacles should be used by a qualified individual.

General Engine Maintenance

Just like cars, boat engines require regular maintenance. Every boat engine is different and the manufacturer's recommendations should be carefully followed. Some general guidelines to minimize the potential negative environmental impacts associated with maintenance are:

- Check for fuel leaks or oil leaks in the bilge or engine compartment/housing regularly.
- Keep the bilge and engine clean so that any new leaks can be easily detected.
- Keep an oil absorption pad on-board to collect spilled products and wipe up residue when maintenance activities are complete.
- Do not drain ANY engine fluids into the water or on the ground. Always capture them in a container large enough to hold the anticipated volume of waste and dispose of them according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- When performing an oil change, make sure all oil is captured and recycled at a center that accepts waste oil. Slipping a plastic bag over the oil filter can be helpful in capturing oil that may be spilled during filter removal.
- When winterizing a boat, use propylene glycol, rather than ethylene glycol antifreeze and be sure to flush these fluids into a container prior to launching in the spring.
- Do NOT top off your tank when refueling in order to reduce the risk of overflow.

For more information email nhppp@des.nh.gov, or call (603) 271-6460.