
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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Managing Boat Washing Wastewater at Marinas

Boat washing and detailing generate wastewater that may contain pollutants derived from cleaning agents or boat surface finishes, which may cause water quality degradation if discharged improperly. Pollutants present in boat cleaning agents may include solvents such as methylene chloride (degreaser), acids and alkalis (stain/mildew removers) or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances [PFAS] (wetting agents). Even if cleaning agents are labeled “green,” “environmentally friendly” or “biodegradable,” they may still contain hazardous substances.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) regulate discharges of pollution. NHDES’ authority to enforce discharges into state waters is provided by the following law:

Section 485-A:13

I. (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 ..."

Careful measures must be taken by marina facilities to manage discharges from boat washing activities and to preserve the quality of surface water and groundwater resources.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Boat Washing at Marinas

Boats should never be washed on a ramp or other location that allows the waste wash-water to discharge to a surface water directly or indirectly. It is a violation of both state and federal law to discharge wastewater to a surface water without a permit and can result in legal action and/or fines.

If your marina is in an area that is served by a regional or municipal sewer system, it is preferable to wash boats in a bay of a building that has a wash-water drain that is connected to the sewer system. When there is no available sewer system connection, consider discharging wastewater to a holding tank that is intermittently pumped out by a licensed hauler. This option requires a [Holding Tank Registration](#) issued by NHDES.

If washing over bare ground is the only option, a [Groundwater Discharge Registration](#) is required. The following BMPs may help reduce the potential to impact groundwater quality:

- **Minimize cleaning agents.** To the extent practicable, minimize the amount of cleaning products and soaps used for boat washing to a scale consistent with the size of the boats being washed. Commonly, very little cleaning agent is recommended by product manufacturers, and small volumes achieve consistent results. Additionally, an initial, high-pressure pre-rinse with only water and brushing may help reduce the amount of soap needed to complete a full cleaning of the boats being washed.
- **Use PFAS-free cleaning agents.** Remember that products labelled as “green,” “environmentally

friendly” or “biodegradable” may still contain hazardous substances, including PFAS. Request laboratory analysis of your cleaning agents and hull wash soaps for PFAS from your product supplier to demonstrate that their products are PFAS-free. You may also sample cleaning agents and wastewater for PFAS yourself, following the guidance in NHDES’ [“Laboratory Testing Guidelines for Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances \(PFAS\) for Private and Public Drinking Water Supplies” fact sheet](#). If PFAS are present in your current products, then find alternative products to use that are PFAS-free.

- **Choose the boat washing location wisely.**
 - Conduct boat washing on a *grassed or vegetated area* where the wash-water can infiltrate into the ground. If no vegetated area is available, wash boats over a gravel area that has been graded with approximately 3 inches of wood chips or coarse bark mulch.
 - Select a location to wash boats that is *not near any water supply well* and as far away as possible from property lines with neighbors who have their own private wells.
- **Recycle wastewater.** If boat washing is a routine patron service that is built into the marina’s operating business, consider installing a closed-loop, water recycling boat wash pad that contains wash-water, filters it, and reuses it without a discharge to the environment. Some closed loop systems are portable and designed for use as seasonal boat washing stations.

For More Information

Please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at [\(603\) 271-2858](tel:6032712858) or GWdischarge@des.nh.gov.

Note: This fact sheet is accurate as of June 2023. Statutory or regulatory changes or the availability of additional information after this date may render this information inaccurate or incomplete.