Detergents are probably the most common type of pollutant associated with boat washing and detailing practices, and if discharged improperly they may cause water quality degradation. Solvents such as methylene chloride are generally used as degreasing agents. Acids and alkalis are commonly used as stain and mildew removers. Phosphorous-containing detergents can cause algae blooms. Some cleaning agents and waxes may contain Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS). Products labeled “green,” “eco-friendly” or “biodegradable” may still contain hazardous substances.

Soapy water is a type of wastewater. 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 aquatic and groundwater resources.

**Managing Wastewater**

Discharges to a closed system, sewer or holding tank, are the preferred options for marinas to manage boat washing wastewater to minimize the potential for discharge of contaminants to groundwater. Discharge of wash water to the sewer requires approval from the local wastewater treatment facility authority and does not require a registration with NHDES. Any discharge of wash water to the ground or groundwater will require registration with NHDES. Information about the type of detergents or other cleaning products used as well as the volume/frequency of discharge is needed as part of registration and any product that contains a regulated contaminant will need to be removed from the wastewater prior to discharge. Typical discharges that require registration with NHDES include:

1. Discharge to a **floor drain** that leads to a dry well, swale, drainage ditch or pit. This registration is required regardless of whether the floor drain first goes through an oil/water separator.
2. Discharge to a **holding tank** (with or without an oil/water separator) that is intermittently pumped out by a licensed hauler.
3. **Discharge** directly over bare ground and **to the ground** in a commonly used wash area at a marina or boat storage area.

Registration with NHDES should be reviewed annually to verify contact information and update cleaning products or formulations used. NHDES and local treatment facilities will want to review components of cleaning agents. This information can be provided by an environmental or safety data sheet.
Boat washing activities should not be done while the boat is still in the water, with the exception of minor non-detergent cleaning with rags and brushes.

While the boat is on the ramp, remove any invasive species and discard in solid waste/trash. A quick hose rinse with a rag is allowed, but the use of cleaning agents on a ramp is prohibited by state and federal law because discharging wastewater into surface water (such as a lake) requires a separate permit.

For questions on groundwater discharge registration, contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at (603) 271-2858 or GWdischarge@des.nh.gov.

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