

CLEAN BOATER TIP SHEET

BOAT CLEANING

In order to keep your boat safe, reliable, and attractive, you must properly clean and maintain it. You can minimize environmental impacts by following the recommendations listed here.

Some of the common solvents and cleaners that are used by boaters can cause harm to the aquatic environment if care is not taken during their use. Some cleaning products contain harsh chemicals such as chlorine, ammonia, and phosphates that can harm fish and wildlife. Chemicals contained in cleaners or antifouling paints can accumulate in aquatic organisms. That is, they become more concentrated as they are ingested successively by animals higher up on the food chain and ultimately may be consumed by a variety of wildlife or humans. While there may be little harm in cleaning a single boat, consider what can happen when many boaters in the marina are doing the same thing. Because marinas are located in a sheltered environment, pollutants tend to build up within their basins.

As a boater on Wisconsin waters, you can be an active steward of our valuable natural resources by implementing these vessel-cleaning practices:

Clean Carefully

- ☞ Whenever possible, clean as much of your boat as you can before launching it for the season. Wash the boat on land in a contained area where the wash water can be collected and treated or soak into the ground. Don't wash your boat on a paved surface that allows the water to flow into a storm sewer and then into the nearest stream or lake.
- ☞ Collect all paint chips, dust, and residue. Dispose of them in your regular trash at home or in designated marina receptacles.
- ☞ While on the water, wash your boat above the waterline by hand with a sponge and plain water. If you do this frequently enough, you won't need to use harsh chemicals as often.
- ☞ If washing with water does not work, try natural cleaners, such as lime juice, borax, and baking soda. See the list of alternatives outlined in the Wisconsin Clean Boater Tip Sheet titled "Nontoxic Cleaning Alternatives."

- ☞ Use cleaning products that are environmentally friendly (e.g., nontoxic and phosphate-free). Always follow the instructions on the label and test the product in an inconspicuous area. Use the products sparingly and only when "elbow grease" is not working.
- ☞ When detergents are necessary, use soaps that are phosphate-free, biodegradable, and nontoxic. Beware of biodegradable cleaners that may still be toxic. All soaps should be used sparingly because even nontoxic products can be harmful to wildlife.
- ☞ Avoid detergents that contain ammonia, sodium hypochlorite (bleach), chlorinate solvents, petroleum distillates, and lye.
- ☞ Avoid cleaning your boat below the waterline while it is in the water.
- ☞ Do not use cleaning solvents on your boat when it is in the water.
- ☞ Wax your boat, if appropriate. A good coat of wax prevents surface dirt from becoming ingrained.
- ☞ Clean teak with a mild soap and abrasive pad, nylon brush, or bronze wool.

Recycle Regularly

- ☞ Become knowledgeable about disposal procedures for waste and hazardous materials at your marina.
- ☞ Bring used solvents and waste gasoline to local hazardous waste collection points.
- ☞ Recycle used oil, oil filters, and antifreeze.

Be a Conscientious Consumer

- ☞ Read product labels. Labels convey information about the degree of hazard associated with a particular product. For example, DANGER equates to extremely flammable, corrosive, or toxic; WARNING indicates that the material is moderately hazardous; and CAUTION signals a less hazardous product. Select products that contain no warning or which merely CAUTION consumers.
- ☞ Be wary of unqualified general claims of environmental benefit, e.g., "ozone friendly." A better, more meaningful label would read, "This product is 95 percent less damaging to the ozone layer than past formulations that contained chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)."