



Clean Boating Tip Sheet

Boat Cleaning and Maintenance

As a boater, you are well aware of the care your investment requires. In order to keep your boat safe, reliable, and attractive, you must continually clean and maintain it. As you do so, you can minimize environmental impacts by following the recommendations listed here. The following recommendations should be readily shared and communicated to the boating public.

Caution is necessary because your choice of products and activities can have serious impacts on water quality and aquatic life. For example, if paint chips from a hull are not contained, they may end up in the water. The heavy metals in the paint chips may then be consumed by bottom dwelling creatures and passed up the food chain to fish, birds, and eventually humans.

Clean Carefully

- Wash frequently with a sponge or nonabrasive pad and plain water. A rinse can help stop growth and will extend the life of the protective coating. Additional “elbow grease” is required to remove stains.
- When detergents are necessary, use soaps that are phosphate free, biodegradable, and nontoxic. Any soap should be used sparingly because even nontoxic products can be harmful to wildlife. For example, detergents will destroy the natural oils on fish gills, limiting their ability to breathe.
- Wax your boat, if appropriate. A good coat of wax prevents surface dirt from becoming ingrained.
- Clean teak with a mild soap and abrasive pads or bronze wool. This method is safe for the environment and better for the boat than the solvents in standard teak cleaners, which tend to eat away at the wood and to damage seam compounds.
- Avoid detergents that contain ammonia, sodium hypochlorite, chlorinated solvents (bleach), petroleum distillates, and lye.
- Try some of the alternative cleaning products such as baking soda, vinegar, lemon juice, and borax.
- In your ship's store, stock the least toxic product to complete the job.
- Arrange a boater's material exchange system to distribute of leftover products and materials.

Appropriate Maintenance

- Collect all paint chips, dust, and residue. Dispose in regular trash.
- Share leftover paint and varnish.
- Use less toxic propylene glycol antifreeze.
- Avoid overkill. Select a bottom paint developed for the Great Lakes region.

Recycle Regularly

- Recycle used oil, oil filters, and antifreeze.
- Bring used solvents and waste gasoline to local hazardous waste collection points.
- Visit the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's web page at www.michigan.gov/deq for local recycling and hazardous waste contacts.

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 warnings or which merely caution consumers.
- Be wary of unqualified general claims of environmental benefit, e.g., “ozone friendly.”
- For additional information about environmentally responsible products, contact Green Seal. Green Seal is an independent, nonprofit organization that establishes environmental standards for consumer goods. Products that meet their criteria are awarded a “Green Seal of Approval.” You may search Green Seal's database of Green Seal certified, environmentally responsible products at www.greenseal.org or call 202-872-6400.