

FISH WASTE

Applicability

This section applies to all marinas.

Background

Fish waste can lead to water quality problems if not properly disposed of within a marina due to its sheltered environment. As part of the decomposition process, bacteria consume oxygen dissolved in the water column, leading to foul odors and, in severe cases, fish kills. It is also unattractive. Who wants to see floating fish parts or smell decaying fish as they lounge on their boat? Although the death and decomposition of fish is a natural process in our waterways, the potential volume of fish waste generated during the heavy boating seasons and fishing tournaments can quickly overwhelm the natural environment if the waste is simply tossed overboard.

Fish cleaning stations offer patrons an alternative to tossing fish waste overboard, leading to a cleaner, more attractive marina. Many patrons appreciate fish cleaning stations as it provides an alternative location to their boat for the messy job of cleaning a fish.



Bluegills (Photo by John Maxwell, IDNR)



This fish cleaning station is at Trail Creek Marina in Michigan City.

Existing Federal and State Laws

The disposal of fish waste is regulated under IC 14-22-9-6, which states all offal or filth of any kind accruing from the catching, curing, cleaning, or shipping of fish in or near the water of Lake Michigan shall be burned, buried, or otherwise disposed of in a sanitary manner that does not pollute the water. It also states the waste should not become detrimental to public health or comfort.

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Best Management Practices

Below are some best management practices that can be implemented to control fish waste within a marina.

- Install fish cleaning stations. The fish cleaning stations should be in a convenient location that is sheltered from wind and rain. The station should be designed to grind the fish waste. Running water should be supplied. Ask your local sanitary district if the station can be plumbed to the sanitary sewer. Keep the cleaning station sanitary and clean to attract patrons.



Encourage boaters to use fish cleaning stations, such as this one at Washington Park Marina in Michigan City.

- Educate patrons on fish waste protocol. Explain that disposing of fish waste in the marina basin is prohibited. Inform them on the locations and hours of fish cleaning stations.
- Prohibit cleaning of fish at docks. This will keep your marina cleaner, keep odors down and reduce nuisance birds and pests.
- Utilize alternative disposal options for fish waste. Consider composting fish waste and using it as a natural fertilizer. The University of Wisconsin Sea Grant Institute has published “The Compost Solution to Dockside Fish Wastes,” a report describing how to compost fish waste and transform it into a useful, potentially marketable product. The report can be downloaded from the Web at <http://aqua.wisc.edu/publications/> (click on “Fisheries Research”) or ordered from the University of Wisconsin Aquatic Sciences Center at (608) 263-3259.
- Help prevent the spread of viral hemorrhagic septicemia (see page 75) and other fish diseases by encouraging boaters not to use fish parts as bait or chum.
- If there are no disposal options, have the boaters double bag the fish waste and dispose of it with the regular trash.