

CLEAN BOATER TIP SHEET



Boat Cleaning

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. While some boaters may not consider there to be much harm in cleaning a single boat, consider the dozens or hundreds of boaters in the marina who are doing the same thing. Due to the sheltered environment in which marinas are located, pollutants tend to build up within their basins.



Wash the boat hull above the waterline by hand. Where feasible, remove the boat from the water and perform cleaning where debris can be captured and properly disposed (Source: U.S. EPA).

Some of the chemicals contained in cleaners or antifouling paints can bioaccumulate in aquatic organisms. That is, they become more concentrated as they are ingested successively by animals higher up on the food chain to ultimately be consumed by a variety of wildlife or humans. You, as a boater on Indiana water, can be an active steward of this valuable resource by implementing these practices:

Environmentally-Friendly Boat Cleaning

- 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.
- While in the water, wash your boat above the waterline by hand with a sponge and plain water and do it frequently enough so that the need to use harsh chemicals is reduced.
- Use cleaning products that are environmentally friendly (e.g., non-toxic or 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. Beware of biodegradable cleaners that may still be toxic.



- Use the recipes for home-made non-toxic cleaning alternatives that are listed in the *Boat Cleaning* section of the *Indiana Clean Marina Guidebook* available on the Web at www.IN.gov/idem/lakemichigan/2540.htm.
- Avoid using caustic cleaners such as bleach, ammonia or lye. Do not use petroleum-based cleaning products.
- Keep your boat waxed. A good coat of wax helps prevent surface dirt from becoming ingrained in the hull and makes your boat easier to clean later.
- Try not to clean your boat below the waterline while it is in the water. Chips of antifouling paint can be displaced into the water where they can potentially cause harm to fish and other organisms that fish feed upon.



This professional boat cleaning service uses “elbow grease” and environmentally-friendly cleaning products. Their practice of washing boats on land reduces pollution to the marina basin.

For More Information

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