

CLEAN BOATER TIP SHEET



Bilges

Bilges can be a major source of pollution in marinas. They tend to collect engine oil, fuel, antifreeze, and transmission fluid. Fuel, oil, and other lubricants contain a potential pollutant known as petroleum hydrocarbons. These products also contain other toxic elements and metals. When the bilge pump is activated manually or automatically, these pollutants are pumped overboard into the water. Over time, these pollutants settle to the lake or river bottom and accumulate in the sediment. Aquatic organisms that feed along the bottom may ingest these pollutants and transmit them up 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:



Use bilge socks to absorb oil (Source: Jay Tanski, New York Sea Grant).

Control Spills and Drips in the Bilge

- Avoid discharging bilge water that has an oily sheen.
- Use bilge socks or absorbent pads to collect floating oil and fuel in the bilge.
- Replace these pads when they are heavily saturated or soiled.
- Properly recycle (if available) or dispose of used absorbents.
- Maintain your boat's engine—no leaking hoses, gaskets or seals.
- Change engine oil using nonspill vacuum-type systems.
- Use antifreeze that is less toxic to the environment (propylene glycol-based).
- Trailer your boat to an area that can contain or treat bilge water before removing the bilge or boat plugs.
- Install a bilge pump switch that leaves an inch or two of water in the bilge.
- Install a bilge water filter to your vessel's bilge. Filters will remove oil and fuel from the water.



- Do not use bilge cleaners when pumping to a waterbody. These cleaners simply disperse the oil and do not remove it from the bilge water.
- Slip a plastic bag over filters before removing them to catch drips.
- Look for contractors or marinas that offer bilge pumpout services.

Handle Spills Appropriately

- Stop the flow and contain the spill.
- If you have a minor spill, clean it up with a rag.
- If there is an oil or fuel spill in the water, do not use detergent to disperse it. Immediately notify the marina office so that the spill can be handled in an appropriate manner.
- Notify the U.S. Coast Guard National Response Center at (800) 424-8802 if there is spill while underway.



Absorbent bilge sock (Source: Volusia County Environmental Management)



The use of a bilge sock would help prevent oil collected in the bottom of this bilge from being discharged to the lake (Photo by Joe Exl, IDNR).

For More Information

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