

Boat Maintenance

Do you routinely work on your boat rather than hire others to do the work for you? Do you clean the deck, repaint the hull, and change the oil? If so, here are some important tips to help you protect the waters wherever you boat.

Boat Cleaning

Soaps and solvents are toxic to marine life. Take care when using harmful products near the water.

1. Minimize the need for soaps and solvents by washing your boat frequently with a coarse cloth and some water.
2. If washing with water does not work, try natural cleaners, such as lime juice, borax, and baking soda. See the list of non-toxic cleaning alternatives.
3. When you need to use detergents, always use biodegradable, non-toxic, phosphate-free soaps, and keep the caps on bottles when cleaning to avoid spills. Biodegradable soaps are comprised of natural compounds that breakdown more rapidly in the environment. Even these soaps can negatively affect marine life so always use as little as possible.
4. Try cleaning teak with a mild soap and abrasive pad, nylon brush, or bronze wool.
5. Do not use cleaning solvents on your boat when it is in the water.

Hull Maintenance

Boat paints contain harmful components including metals, solvents, and dyes. Precautions must be taken to prevent paint and paint chips from ending up in the water.

1. Check with marina staff to find out where hull maintenance is allowed at the marina.
2. Do not work on your hull near the water or on the mudflats at low tide.
3. Never clean your boat bottom when it is in the water because toxic paint may be removed.
4. Use a dust-free sander if possible. It will reduce cleanup time and is more enjoyable to use because you won't be breathing in paint dust. Ask your marine professional if they are provided through the marina.
5. If you are not using a dust-free sander, use tarps and filter cloth to help collect your scraps.
6. Keep your work area clean.
7. Let emptied paint cans and brushes dry before disposing them.
8. Share your leftover paint with a friend or marina staff rather than throwing it away. Dispose of old paint at a household hazardous waste facility in your municipality, or check with your marine professional.

Clean Boater Fact Sheet





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9. Ask if your facility has a collection area for boat maintenance waste from boaters. If not, take home and dispose of as household hazardous waste.
10. Use water-based paints and solvents. You can find them at most stores that sell marine paints.

Engine Maintenance

Routine engine servicing requires the handling of toxic substances such as oil and solvents. Care must be taken while the cleaning is done.

1. Check with marina staff to find out where engine maintenance is allowed at the marina.
2. Clean up work area with absorbent materials and a broom, instead of hosing.
3. Ask if your facility has a collection area for boat maintenance waste from boaters (used oil filters, waste oil, lead-acid batteries, etc.). If not, take home and dispose of as household hazardous waste.
4. Pre-clean engine parts with a wire brush to eliminate the need for solvents.
5. Keep your engine well tuned to prevent leaks, and keep it clean to spot oil and gas leaks more easily.
6. If you must use solvents, use VOC-free solvents.
7. Use the orange-pink colored propylene antifreeze, which is nontoxic, rather than the blue-green colored ethylene glycol, which is toxic to marine life.
8. Never fill fuel tanks all the way because gasoline expands as it warms, causing a potentially explosive condition.
9. Never pour oil or oily liquids into the water – it is illegal.

*Adapted with permission from Connecticut Clean Marina Guide Book
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