

Clean Boating Tip Sheet

Vessel Cleaning and Maintenance

As a boater, you are well aware of the care your vessel requires. In order to keep your boat safe, reliable, and attractive, you must clean and maintain it. As you do so, minimize environmental impacts by following the recommendations listed here.

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 harm worms, oysters, and other bottom-dwelling creatures and, thus, disrupt the aquatic food chain.

Clean Carefully

- Wash frequently with a sponge or nonabrasive pad and plain water. This approach is very effective at removing salt. Additional “elbow-grease” is required to remove stains.
- When detergents are necessary, use soaps that are phosphate-free, biodegradable, and non-toxic. Any soap should be used sparingly because even non-toxic 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 listed on the reverse side of this page.

Maintain Mindfully

- 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 mid-Atlantic region.

Recycle Regularly

- Recycle used oil, oil filters, and antifreeze.
- Bring used solvents and waste gasoline to local hazardous waste collection days.
- Call 1-800-4-RECYCLE for locations of recycling centers.
- Visit menv.com for locations of free, public collection tanks for oil and antifreeze.
- Contact your county solid waste department to inquire about household hazardous waste collection days.



Be a Conscientious Consumer

- Choose products with the labels shown here.
- Find “Safer Choice” products at epa.gov/saferchoice/products. Type “Marine” in the “Product or Company Name” field.
- Visit greenseal.org for their independently verified list of products.
- 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.” A better, more meaningful label would read, “This product is 95 percent less damaging to the ozone layer than past formulations that contained chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).”



Scan and search for “boat” or “marine” to find Safer Choice products for your boat.

Alternatives to Toxic Products

While baking soda, vinegar, lemon juice, and vegetable oils are far less harmful than bleaches, scouring powders or detergents, they are still toxic to marine life. Use cleaning products sparingly and prevent discharge into the water to the extent possible (e.g., clean with a pail of water and sponge for disposal ashore). Never dispose of any cleaning products down the thru-hull drain; dispose of them on shore.

Product	Alternative
Bleach	Borax
Detergent & Soap	Elbow grease
Scouring Powders	Baking soda. Or rub area with one-half lemon dipped in borax, then rinse
General Cleaner	Baking soda and vinegar. Or lemon juice combined with borax paste
Floor Cleaner	One cup vinegar + 2 gallons of water
Window Cleaner	One cup vinegar + 1 qt. warm water. Rinse and squeegee
Aluminum Cleaner	2 Tbsp. cream of tartar + 1 qt. of hot water
Brass Cleaner	Worcestershire sauce. Or paste made of equal amounts of salt, vinegar, and water
Copper Cleaner	Lemon juice and water. Or paste of lemon juice, salt, and flour
Chrome Cleaner/Polish	Apple cider vinegar to clean; baby oil to polish
Stainless Steel Cleaner	Baking soda or mineral oil for polishing, vinegar to remove spots
Fiberglass Stain Remover	Baking soda paste
Mildew Remover	Paste with equal amounts of lemon juice and salt, or white vinegar and salt
Drain Opener	Disassemble or use plumber’s snake. Or flush with boiling water + one-quarter cup baking soda + one-quarter cup vinegar
Wood Polish	Olive or almond oil (interior walls only)
Hand Cleaner	Baby oil or margarine
Head & Shower	Baking soda; brush thoroughly
Rug/Upholstery Cleaner	Dry corn starch sprinkled on; vacuum

Adapted from Buller, Pat. 1995. Clean Marina+Clean Boating+Clean Water Partnership. Seattle, WA: Puget Soundkeeper Alliance.



For information about the Maryland Clean Marina Initiative, contact the Maryland Department of Natural Resources at (410) 260-8773 or visit dnr.maryland.gov/boating