



PETROLEUM CONTROL

Clean Boating Tip Sheet

Petroleum is Harmful

Petroleum in or on the water is harmful and, in some cases, fatal to aquatic life. Floating petroleum is particularly bad because it reduces light penetration and the exchange of oxygen at the water's surface. Floating oil also contaminates the microlayer. The microlayer refers to the uppermost portion of the water column. It is home to thousands of species of plants, animals, and microbes. The abundance of life in the microlayer attracts predators: seabirds from above and fish from below. Pollution in the microlayer, thus, has the potential to poison much of the aquatic food web.

The Law

The Federal Water Pollution Control Act (also called the Clean Water Act) prohibits the discharge of oil or oily waste into or upon the navigable waters of the United States or the waters of the contiguous zone if such discharge causes a film or sheen upon, or discoloration of, the surface of the water, or causes a sludge or emulsion beneath the surface of the water. Violators are subject to a penalty of \$5,000 from the U.S. Coast Guard. State law also prohibits the discharge of oil which may result in additional fines.

Best Practices for Fueling

Gas or diesel may be spilled during the act of fueling: as back splash out the fuel intake or as overflow out the vent fitting. Spills of this sort harm aquatic life, waste money, and can result in stains on the hull and damage to the gel coat and striping. Follow these tips to avoid problems:

- Fill tanks to no more than 90 percent capacity – gas that is drawn from cool storage tanks will expand as it warms up onboard your boat.
- To determine when the tank is 90 percent full, listen to the filler pipe, use a sounding stick, and be aware of your tank's volume.
- Rather than filling your tank upon your return to port, wait and fill it just before leaving on your next trip. This practice

will reduce spills due to thermal expansion because the fuel will be used before it has a chance to warm-up.

- Fill portable tanks ashore where spills are less likely to occur and easier to cleanup.
- Use oil absorbent pads to catch all drips.
- Slow down at the beginning and end of fueling.

Bilge Maintenance

Engine oil tends to accumulate in bilges. If no precautions are taken, the oil is pumped overboard along with the bilge water. Discharging oily water is illegal. To avoid fines and to protect water quality, follow these tips:

- Keep your engine well tuned to minimize the amount of oil that is released. Be sure there are no leaking seals, gaskets, or hoses.
- Place oil absorbent materials or a bioremediating bilge pillow in the bilge.
- Place an oil absorbent pad under the engine.
- Replace oil absorbent materials regularly.
- Look for contractors or marinas that offer a bilge pumpout service.
- Do not treat oily water with detergents. Soaps pollute and make cleanup impossible. You may be fined up to \$25,000 for using soaps to dissipate oil.

Disposal of Oil Absorbent Materials

The disposal of used oil absorbent material depends on what type of product it is and how it was used:

- Standard absorbents that are saturated with gasoline may be air dried and reused.
- Standard absorbents saturated with oil or diesel may be wrung out over oil recycling bins (if they are saturated with oil or diesel only!) and reused. Alternatively, they should be double-bagged with a sealed plastic bag inside of another sealed bag and tossed in the regular trash.
- Bioremediating bilge booms may be disposed in the regular trash as long as they are not dripping any liquid. Because

the microbes need oxygen to function, do not seal them in plastic bags.

Emissions Control

Marine engines – especially 2-stroke outboard motors – produce the highest average level of hydrocarbon exhaust emissions after lawn and garden equipment. Hydrocarbon emissions contribute to ground level ozone, a known health risk. Follow these tips to help your engine operate as efficiently as possible:

- Use the gas to oil ratio recommended by the engine manufacturer. Too much oil can foul spark plugs and too little can lead to increased engine wear or even failure.
- Use premium two-cycle engine oil (TC-W3 or TC-W4). Premium oils improve engine performance and reduce pollution because they burn cleaner, contain more detergents, and prevent formation of carbon deposits.
- Use gasoline with the octane level recommended by the engine manufacturer.

Preventive Equipment

Products are available commercially which can help you prevent spills and reduce emissions:

- Install a fuel/air separator along your vent line. These devices allow air, but not fuel, to escape through a vent opening.
- Attach a safety nozzle to portable gas cans used to fill outboard engines. These nozzles automatically stop the flow of fuel when the receiving tank is full.
- To prevent oily bilge water from being discharged, install a bilge pump switch that leaves an inch or two of water in the bilge. Alternatively, connect a bilge water filter to your boat's bilge pump. Filters will remove oil, fuel, and other petroleum hydrocarbons from the water.
- When purchasing a new engine, select a fuel efficient, low emission model.