
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



29 Hazen Drive, Concord, New Hampshire 03301 • (603) 271-3503 • www.des.nh.gov

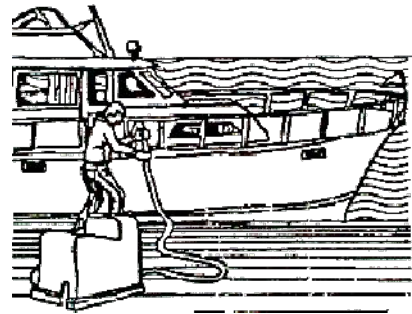
WD-BB-38

2010

The DES Boat Inspection Program

Keeping Sewage and Greywater Out of New Hampshire Lakes

The State of New Hampshire takes great pride in the outstanding water quality of its lakes. As part of our ongoing efforts to ensure clean lakes, and as a free service to boat owners, the Department of Environmental Services conducts boat inspections for freshwater vessels with onboard wastewater containment facilities. Although all fresh waters of the state are of concern, the program has focused attention on Lakes Winnepesaukee and Winnisquam where a high percentage of large boats with wastewater containment systems are located.



Random inspections of occupied boats are conducted at marinas or at private docks, at the convenience of the owner or boat operator. The typical inspection takes about 20 minutes. This results in a minimal disruption of the boaters' activities (so they may continue to enjoy the lakes). Boat owners may even solicit an inspection, either through their marina, by calling DES or by personal request when a DES inspector is on site.

Once on board, the inspector checks all onboard facilities that are designed to receive or hold sewage or greywater, including sinks, showers, holding tanks, valves, and plumbing. Starting at the various receiving fixtures, the plumbing is traced to the final onboard holding tank(s). **There may be no means of overboard discharge, either directly or indirectly** (RSA 487:2). Waste must be removed from boat holding tanks at marina pumpout stations. Upon completion of the inspection, boat registration and statistical data is collected and, if found in compliance with state law, the boat is identified with a DES decal. If the boat is not in compliance, the corrective measures are outlined and a schedule is agreed upon for re-inspection. The law currently provides for an administrative fine up to \$2,000 for each offense and loss of boat registration if a problem is not remedied within 48 hours of citation.

History

The State of New Hampshire has regulated boat sewage for over 40 years. Concerns about potential health risks and water quality degradation caused by boats discharging untreated sewage into state waters prompted the New Hampshire Legislature to enact a law to require treatment devices on marine toilets in 1957. While these macerator/chlorinator devices reduced fecal bacteria levels, they did not remove nutrients and organic material which can degrade water

quality over time. **The law was amended in 1967 to prohibit any sewage discharge from boats** (currently RSA 487:2, Marine Toilets and Disposal of Sewage from Boats). The law also contained provisions for enforcement by water pollution inspectors.

Since many boats are still manufactured with overboard discharge systems, New Hampshire sought special status under the federal Clean Water Act to designate all of the waters of the state as a "no-discharge" zone. This status was granted, establishing more stringent requirements for vessels brought to our lakes.

In the last 20 years, there has been a significant increase in the number of boats used as vacation or seasonal "homes." To prevent further degradation of water quality, the state passed an amendment to prohibit the discharge of sink and shower waste (greywater) as part of the "no-discharge" standard. The amendment also added the provision that **"no person shall knowingly launch into fresh waters of the state any boat which is not equipped in compliance with the provisions of this chapter."**

The DES Boat Inspection Program has been successfully operating for over 40 years. In the last 20 years, over 2,300 boats have received inspection decals, typically in June, July, and August when boating activity is at its height.

Program Goals

Educate the boating public about proper disposal of human waste and greywater. Since the "no-discharge" law applies to all boats, regardless of the state where they are registered, educating both in-state and out-of-state boaters about New Hampshire's strict "no-discharge" law is critical to the protection of the state's fresh waters. The inspection program is fortunate to be able to utilize the resources of the state's marinas, which will continue to play an important role in educating the public about the law. Marinas are in a unique position to help the state because they possess the knowledge and skills needed to identify and remedy problems with boats that are not in compliance with the law.

Provide for public health by ensuring that discharges from boats are not occurring in lakes. In addition to deteriorating lake quality, the discharge of human waste to lakes creates a significant health hazard. A number of diseases including cholera and hepatitis are water-borne and can be transmitted from human waste to those recreating in the waters. Similarly, greywater from sinks and showers may contain harmful concentrations of microorganisms.

Maintain excellent water quality in New Hampshire's lakes. New Hampshire takes pride in the high quality of its lakes. However, improper disposal of boat waste is a significant threat to lake quality. Boat wastes contain nutrients that promote the growth of cyanobacteria and algae while providing the necessary elements to increase native and invasive aquatic plant growth. Keeping our lakes clean and free from sources of pollution is an important goal of the Boat Inspection Program.

Let's all do our part to keep New Hampshire's lakes clean!

Please call DES at (603) 271-2963 for more information on the inspection program, or go to <http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wmb/lakes/index.htm> for more information on lake topics.