



LOAN COPY ONLY

BOATER FACT SHEET

Rhode Island Sea Grant, University of Rhode Island Bay Campus, Narragansett, Rhode Island 02882-1197 (401) 874-6842

Bilges, Fueling, and Spill Response

It is not uncommon to see a small fuel sheen on the water surface near boats. Although it may only be a tiny amount from some boats, the cumulative impacts can be damaging. Once in the marine environment, oils and fuels have a tendency to accumulate in bottom sediments and concentrate in marine organisms. These harmful substances commonly enter the marine environment through bilge pumping, fueling, and improper response to spills.



You can play an important role in protecting water quality by following the simple tips listed below.

Boater Tips:

1. Bilge Pumping

- Prior to pumping, inspect the bilge to ensure that no fuel or oil has been spilled.
- Do not discharge bilge water if there is a sheen to it.
- The best technique for dealing with oil in the bilge is to continually check and fix all leaks.
- Petroleum absorbent materials, such as bilge pillows and engine pan pads, are very effective at removing oils from bilge water.
- As a further preventative measure, oil/water separators can be installed in bilge pump discharge lines.
- If dirty bilge water cannot be sufficiently cleaned to allow legal discharge, make arrangements with a marina capable of properly disposing of tainted water.

2. Fueling

- Prevent fuel from falling into the water during fueling.
- Don't just top off the tanks, know the capacities of your fuel tanks *prior* to filling.
- Place an absorbent pad or container over the fuel fill or under the fuel vent to collect accidental overflow.
- Listen to the filler pipe to anticipate when the tank is full and to avoid back-splash.
- Stop pumping at the first sign of fuel escape.
- To prevent spillage from tank vents, install a fuel/air separator or an air whistle in your tank's vent line.

3. Spill Response

- Stop the source of the spill first.
- Then focus on containing it, preferably with booms.
- When a spill does occur, it should be reported immediately—federal law requires it.
- Do not use emulsifiers or dispersants (soaps) to treat a spill; this is prohibited by federal law.
- For small spill cleanup, cover the spill with absorbent materials.
- When clean up is complete, properly dispose of used spill response materials.

The boater fact sheet series is produced by the Rhode Island Sea Grant Marine Advisory Service with funding from the R.I. Department of Environmental Management Narragansett Bay Project, through a grant issued by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under the Clean Water Act.

