

FACT SHEET 2-VESSEL SEWAGE

Raw or poorly treated boat sewage is harmful to human health and water quality. Typhoid, hepatitis, cholera, gastroenteritis, and other waterborne diseases may be passed directly to people who swim in contaminated waters. People may also become infected by eating shellfish contaminated with virus and other micro-organisms contained in sewage discharge. Sewage is also harmful to water quality. Because the microorganisms within sewage need oxygen, any effluent discharged to waterways reduces the amount of oxygen available to fish and other forms of aquatic life. Furthermore, the heavy nutrient load in sewage promotes excessive algal growth. As the algae multiply, they prevent life-giving sunlight from reaching subsurface vegetation. When the algae die they create another problem; the algae are decomposed by bacteria which further reduce levels of dissolved oxygen.

WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

According to Federal and State law, it is illegal to discharge raw sewage. All vessels with installed toilets must have a Marine Sanitation Device (MSD)

- Type I systems mechanically cut solids and disinfect waste. They must bear a U.S. Coast Guard certification label.
- Type II systems are similar to Type I systems. The difference is that Type IIs treat sewage to a higher standard and generally require more space and energy. Type II systems must also have a Coast Guard certification label.
- Type III systems do not discharge sewage. Holding tanks are the most common Type III system. Incinerating systems are another option. A Coast Guard label is not required. Vessels 65 feet and under may have any of these three types of MSDs. Vessels over 65 feet must have a Type II or III system.

METHODS:

Holding Tank Information

- Install a holding tank.
- Use good plumbing to control holding tank odor. Fiberglass and metal tanks are highly resistant to permeation. Specially labeled flexible “sanitation hoses” and PVC piping are also highly impermeable. Hose runs should be as short and as straight as possible. Wherever practical, use rigid pipe below the level of the holding tank and in other areas where sewage will accumulate. Keep the number of connections to a minimum and insure that seals are tight.
- Use enzyme-based products in holding tank to further control odor. Enzymatic products use biological processes, rather than harsh chemicals, to break down sewage. Be sure to pump and rinse the holding tank prior to initial use of an enzyme product if you have used chemical-based odor control additives in the past. Chemical residues may interfere with the effectiveness of enzymebased products.
- Avoid holding tank products that contain quaternary ammonium compounds (QACs) and formaldehyde. These products may disrupt sewage treatment plants.

Type I and Type II MSDs

- To maintain Type I or II MSDs, establish a regular maintenance schedule based on the owner’s manual and remind the boater when chemicals need to be added, electrodes need to be cleaned, etc.

- Do not discharge your Type I or II MSD while in a marina, in a swimming area, over an oyster bar, or in a poorly flushed area. Effluent from legal Type I and Type II systems contains nutrients and possibly toxic chemicals. It may contain pathogens as well.
- Use shoreside restrooms when in port.