

Smart Harbors



Spring 2026

Updates From Virginia Institute of Marine Science

CMP Best Management Practice of the Quarter: Develop Emergency Response Plans

This quarter's Best Management Practice is to develop Emergency Response Plans. With a busy summer and hurricane season right around the corner, it's a great time to make sure your marina has its hurricane and spill prevention plans ready and accessible for staff. BoatUS has developed a handy [hurricane guide](#) to make sure you've checked everything off your list.

Why become a Virginia Clean Boater?

By adopting pollution prevention measures, Virginia Clean Boaters can take satisfaction in knowing they are doing their part to keep Virginia waterways clean, preserve our waterways for the future, and learn/teach clean boating habits. For more information, visit our [Clean Boater Guide webpage](#).



Updated VA Clean Marina Recertification Checklists

The updated VA Clean Marina Program recertification checklists have been posted to [our website](#). Next time you recertify, please use the updated version. If you'd like a copy emailed or mailed to you, please email acclark@vims.edu.

CMP Highlighted Marina – Whitehouse Cove

This quarter’s highlighted marina is Whitehouse Cove Marina, a Virginia Clean Marina located in Poquoson with direct access to the Chesapeake Bay. Re-certified in February 2026 through the Virginia Clean Marina Program, the marina continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to environmental stewardship and clean boating practices.

Situated in a protected cove off the Poquoson River, Whitehouse Cove Marina offers deep-water access along with covered slips up to 60 feet and transient dockage for vessels up to 110 feet. The facility features modern floating docks, 50 Amp electrical service, year-round water, and convenient amenities including pump-out services, Wi-Fi, a swimming pool, and on-site dining at the Surf Rider Restaurant.

The marina maintains a welcoming atmosphere and active boating community while prioritizing environmental responsibility. From maintaining a reliable pump-out system and stormwater management practices to supporting proper waste disposal and routine property cleanups, Whitehouse Cove Marina is committed to protecting the surrounding waterways and promoting clean boating habits.

With easy access to destinations like Yorktown, Hampton, and Mobjack Bay, Whitehouse Cove Marina provides a well-maintained home port for both local and visiting boaters exploring Virginia’s coastal waters. For more information, contact infowhc@whitehousecovemarina.com or (757) 231-1006.



Industry News

Scientists worry about lasting damage from Potomac sewage spill

From Michael Copley, NPR, February 20, 2026

In January, part of a decades-old sewer line in Maryland collapsed by the Potomac River. Over the following days, the broken pipe dumped more than 200 million gallons of raw sewage into the Potomac near Washington, D.C.

Since then, the utility that manages the line, DC Water, has been setting up a system of pumps and a steel bulkhead to divert wastewater around the broken section of pipe so crews can begin repairs. The area's drinking water hasn't been contaminated, but scientists and environmental advocates say the damage could still be severe in a watershed that stretches to the Chesapeake Bay.

"There's a ton of nasty stuff in raw sewage. It's not just waste and bacteria, but you have all sorts of pharmaceuticals that end up in the pipe system. You have different chemicals that people pour down the sink or into drains," says Gary Belan, senior director of the clean water program at American Rivers, an advocacy group. "So a lot of that stuff can sink to the bottom of the river, have impacts on fish reproduction, bird reproduction, killing a lot of the insects, contaminating the soil."

The Potomac accident is among the largest sewage spills in U.S. history, and it highlights a chronic problem facing communities around the United States, says Gussie Maguire, Maryland staff scientist at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

Sewer systems, especially those that handle a combination of wastewater and stormwater, [often overflow](#) during [heavy rains](#). The problem is exacerbated by population growth that's straining aging infrastructure. Climate change is also a factor, Maguire says, because as temperatures rise, [storms dump more rain](#) in shorter periods of time, overwhelming sewer and stormwater systems.

"The intensity is a really important part of it," Maguire says, adding: "It is absolutely a climate problem that will continue to get worse."

It isn't clear what caused the sewer line collapse in Maryland. DC Water has said that it [found signs of corrosion](#) when it inspected the 1960s-era pipe about a decade ago and that it had plans to rehabilitate damaged sections.

It's also too soon to know what the full impacts will be. DC Water [has reported](#) elevated levels of the bacteria *E. coli* at the site of the overflow. Bacteria don't thrive in cold water, but as temperatures warm this summer, the spill could produce algae blooms in the river that kill fish, says Mike Gerel, Virginia science manager at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

The spill could also have lasting consequences for waterfront communities, as well as swimmers and boaters who use the river, says Dean Naujoks, the Potomac riverkeeper, an environmental advocate.

"What are we going to do to bring people back and reassure them that the river's safe again?" he asks.

"Once you put 243 million gallons of raw sewage into a river, any river, you're not getting it back out," Naujoks adds, saying the waste will eventually wash downstream to the Chesapeake Bay and out into the Atlantic Ocean.

Scientists and environmental advocates have [spent decades](#) trying to reduce the amount of pollution in the Chesapeake Bay, which stretches 200 miles along the mid-Atlantic coast and is bordered by Maryland and Virginia.

"This is not only a blow to the Potomac River," Naujoks says, "but a blow to the Chesapeake Bay."

On Wednesday, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser [requested federal disaster support](#), including full reimbursement for DC Water. The White House didn't immediately respond to a message seeking comment.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) said in an emailed statement that it "remains ready to support our partners on the ground and is committed to ongoing coordination to ensure that the response is done as expeditiously as possible."

President Trump has [tried to blame](#) local Democratic leaders for the sewage spill. However, DC Water is [overseen](#) by the EPA.

"The ultimate authority that really needs to be aggressive in addressing this is the Environmental Protection Agency," says Gerel, the Virginia science manager at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

DC Water's chief executive, David Gadis, said in a [public letter](#) this month that the incident "underscored a broader reality facing utilities across the country: much of the infrastructure that protects our waterways was built decades ago, long before today's environmental standards, population growth, and climate pressures."

The solution is to invest more money to upgrade the country's infrastructure, Gerel says. "I love bridges, I love safe roads," he says, "but I also love unsexy pipes that are underground. We need to fix those."

Authorities still cleaning up after Newport News Shipbuilding dumped more than 7,000 gallons of jet fuel into the James River

From Steve Walsh, WHRO, February 17, 2026

Residents have smelled odors and seen an oil sheen from Newport News to the HRBT.

Workers at Newport News Shipbuilding were transferring jet fuel to the future John F. Kennedy aircraft carrier Friday when the fuel known as JP-5 spilled into the river, at the shipyard.

The company originally reported that roughly 50 gallons had been spilled. An inspection of the fuel tanks by state investigators the next day found that between 7,000 and 8,000 gallons of jet fuel leaked into the James River.

The public has reported an odor and an oily sheen on the water. Pollution Assessment teams from Coast Guard Sector Virginia, supported by Coast Guard Station Portsmouth boat crews and a drone, have mapped out an area of concern from Newport News past the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel. One loon has been found dead, says the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

"Clean up and remediation efforts were initiated immediately to contain the fuel and protect the surrounding environment. The U.S. Coast Guard and local authorities were notified – they are reviewing and monitoring the ongoing cleanup process," said Todd Corillo, spokesman for Huntington Ingalls Industries, the parent of Newport News Shipbuilding.

The cleanup is still ongoing Tuesday. Authorities believe much of the spill was contained near the shipyard. The company and contractors cordoned off the spill and began removing fuel from the water near the shipyard.

By early Tuesday evening, the company was lowering the estimate of how much fuel was dumped into the river, saying it was no more than 4,722 gallon. The rest can be attributed to fuel found in the ship's piping system and storage tanks, Corillo said.

"We understand that a spill of this nature is deeply concerning to those who live by and enjoy the natural beauty of the James River," Corillo said. "We are committed to being a good neighbor and thank our shipbuilders, community partners, and responding agencies for their quick actions and continued engagement to bring this process to a successful close."

The state has not found an impact on drinking water or shellfish growing areas, according to the VDEQ.

According to the Virginia Department of Health, odors from jet fuel can result in headache, nausea and throat irritation. Individuals with asthma or other respiratory conditions may be sensitive to fuel vapors and therefore may experience more discomfort or irritation. The state recommends that people experiencing symptoms should see a doctor.

The accident remains under investigation by state and local authorities.

The Kennedy is the latest Ford Class aircraft carrier. Originally, the carrier was set to be turned over to the Navy last year, but it is now expected to be finished in the spring of 2027. The carrier had just been out to sea with a full crew for its first builder trials.

The carrier itself is nuclear powered. The JP-5 is used to fuel aircraft assigned to the ship. The jet fuel is known to cause health problems. Though the company was in charge of Friday's fuel transfer, the military has had several incidents involving spilled jet fuel.

In 2021, fuel from Red Hill Bulk Storage Facility leaked into the water supply for the nearby Navy base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. A much larger, 24 million gallon leak went on for decades at Kirtland Air Force Base. Discovered in 1999, it threatened the drinking water for Albuquerque, New Mexico and it is still being cleaned up.

Please Share Your News!

If you have any news that you would like included in the Clean Marina Newsletter, *Smart Harbors*, please let us know! This is a quarterly newsletter with the next issue scheduled for Summer 2026 and we would like to include information from the marina community. If you have comments or questions, please email the Virginia Clean Marina Program: askVCMP@vims.edu or acclark@vims.edu or call (804) 684-7768.

