

Clean Vessel Act

Federal Regulations Prevent Untreated Sewage Discharge from Boats

Overview

Federal regulations prohibit the discharge of untreated sewage (black water) in all navigable U.S. waters from a point source unless certain very specific conditions are met. The Clean Water Act broadly prohibits waste discharges into U.S. waters and has established standards for marine sanitation devices (MSD), which treat boat sewage or hold it until it can be discharged onshore at proper sewage facilities.

In 1992, Congress passed the Clean Vessel Act (CVA), which established a five-year federal grant program administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and authorized \$40 million for use by the states to build boat sewage pumpout facilities for the disposal of untreated boat sewage. Congress reauthorized CVA in 1998, extending the pumpout grant program and providing \$50 million to continue to provide alternatives to overboard disposal of recreational boater sewage.



What is a Marine Sanitation Device?

An MSD is designed to keep “untreated or inadequately treated” boat sewage out of navigable U.S. waters. All boats with installed marine toilets must have an operable Coast Guard-approved MSD. Only adequately treated waste in accordance with federal law may be discharged in navigable U.S. waters, except in freshwater lakes and other geographical no discharge areas and in state-initiated No Discharge Zones

How Are Boat Wastewater Laws Enforced?

Vessel pollution control under the Clean Water Act is administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in conjunction with other federal, state and local government agencies. The Act is designed to maximize federal-state cooperation in the enforcement, and it also allows states to establish No Discharge Zones if there are sufficient onshore sewage facilities available. The U.S. Coast Guard and the state in which the zone has been designated enforce these laws, violations of which can result in considerable criminal and civil penalties. No discharges are allowed in any freshwater lakes, freshwater reservoirs or freshwater impoundments whose entrance points and exit points are too shallow to support traffic by boats with installed toilets.



**KEEP OUR
WATER CLEAN—
USE PUMPOUTS**

How do Boaters Know about the Clean Vessel Act?

The Clean Vessel Act requires that all recreational vessels have access to pumpouts and attempts to accomplish this objective by making available grants to states on a competitive basis for the construction and/or renovation, operation and maintenance of pumpout and portable toilet dump stations. The Clean Vessel Act also educates boaters through an extensive and ongoing public awareness campaign. Since the CVA's passage in 1992, grants have been awarded to install 2,200 pumpout stations and 1,400 dump stations.
