

# Bilge Water

Bilges can be a major source of pollution in boat harbours. They tend to collect engine oil, fuel, antifreeze, and transmission fluid. Fuel, oil, and other lubricants contain a potential pollutant known as petroleum hydrocarbons. These products also contain other toxic elements and metals. When the bilge pump is activated manually or automatically, these pollutants are pumped overboard into the water. Over time, these pollutants settle to the lake or river bottom and accumulate in the sediment. Aquatic organisms that feed along the bottom may ingest these pollutants and transmit them up the food chain to ultimately be consumed by a variety of wildlife or humans. You, as a boater, can be an active steward of this valuable resource by implementing these simple practices:



The use of a bilge sock would help prevent oil collected in the bottom of this bilge from being discharged to the marine environment

## If you are a boat owner:

- Ensure the engine is properly maintained, that it does not leak oil or fuel, and that the bilge is kept clean
- Don't undertake oil changes and then allow the waste oil to empty into your bilge
- Change your oil using non spill vacuum type systems
- Stop water leaking into the boat, so you do not need to pump out so often soak up any floating oil with absorbent material (newspaper, rags or paper towels in an emergency) before turning on the bilge pump
- Never mix detergent with oily bilge water; this mixture can be even more toxic than oil alone, and is very difficult to clean
- Use bilge socks or absorbent pads to collect floating oil and fuel in the bilge.
- Replace these pads when they are heavily saturated or soiled.
- Ensure there is no floating oil in the bilges, if you have an automatic bilge pump – larger boats can install a bilge water filter that will remove most contaminants.
- Avoid discharging bilge water that has an oily sheen.

Remember, oil and fuel sloshing around in your bilge increases the risk of fire or explosion, and can be toxic to occupants within the cabin. When oil is pumped out of a bilge, an unsightly residue forms that can taint the bilge and is very hard to remove.

## Clean & Green Solutions:

- Do Not use bilge cleaners when discharging to the marine environment. These cleaners simply disperse the oil and do not remove it from the bilge water.
- Slip a plastic bag over the used filters before removing them to catch drips
- Look for contractors or marinas that offer a bilge pump out service.



Absorbent bilge sock available from most Boat Chandlers

## Handle Spills Appropriately

- Stop the flow and contain the spill.
- If you have a minor spill, clean it up with a rag.
- If there is an oil or fuel spill in the water, do not use detergent to disperse it. Immediately notify the marina office so that the spill can be handled in an appropriate manner.
- Notify the Marina Operator, local Coast Guard or Regional Council