

# Vessel Cleaning & Maintenance

***As a boater, you are well aware of the care your vessel requires. By following the recommendations listed here, you can minimize the environmental impacts of routine cleaning and maintenance necessary to keep your boat safe, reliable and attractive.***

Your choice of products and activities can negatively impact water quality and aquatic life. For example, paint chips from antifouling paints contain heavy metals. When the paint chips accidentally end up in the water they may be consumed by shellfish, worms, and other bottom-dwelling creatures and pass up the food chain to fish, birds, and humans.

## **CLEAN CAREFULLY**

- Wash boat surfaces frequently with a sponge or nonabrasive pad and plain water. This approach is very effective at removing salt. Additional “elbow-grease” is required to remove stains.
- When detergents are necessary, use phosphate-free, biodegradable, and non-toxic soaps. Use soap sparingly because even non-toxic products can be harmful to wildlife. For example, detergents will destroy the natural oils on fish gills, limiting their ability to breathe.
- Wax your boat, if appropriate. A good coat of wax prevents surface dirt from becoming ingrained.

- Clean teak with a mild soap and abrasive pads or bronze wool. This method is safe for the environment and better for the boat than the solvents in standard teak cleaners that tend to eat away at the wood and damage seam compounds.
- Avoid detergents that contain ammonia, sodium hypochlorite, chlorinated solvents (bleach), petroleum distillates, and lye.
- Try some of the alternative cleaning products listed on the chart on the back of this page.



## **MAINTAIN MINDFULLY**

- Collect all paint chips, dust, and residue and dispose of in regular trash.
- Share leftover paint and varnish.
- Use less-toxic propylene glycol antifreeze.
- Avoid overkill. Select a bottom paint developed for the mid-Atlantic region.

## **RECYCLE REGULARLY**

- Recycle used oil, oil filters, and antifreeze.
- Take used solvents and waste gasoline to local hazardous waste collection sites.
- Visit the NJDEP’s web page at [www.state.nj.us/dep/dshw/recycle/recycor.htm](http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dshw/recycle/recycor.htm) for local recycling and hazardous waste contacts.

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## BE A CONSCIENTIOUS CONSUMER

- Read product labels. Labels convey information about the degree of hazard associated with a particular product.
  - DANGER equates to extremely flammable, corrosive or toxic;
  - WARNING indicates that the material is moderately hazardous, and
  - CAUTION signals a less hazardous product.
 Select products that contain no warnings or which merely CAUTION consumers.
- Be wary of unqualified general claims of environmental benefit, e.g., “ozone friendly.” A better, more meaningful label would read, “This

product is 95 percent less damaging to the ozone layer than past formulations that contained chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).”

- For additional information about environmentally responsible products contact Green Seal. Green Seal is an independent, non-profit organization that sets environmental standards for consumer goods. Products that meet their criteria are awarded a “Green Seal of Approval.” You may search Green Seal’s database of Green Seal-certified, environmentally responsible products at [www.greenseal.org](http://www.greenseal.org) or call 202-872-6400.



## ALTERNATIVES TO TOXIC PRODUCTS

**While baking soda, vinegar, lemon juice, and vegetable oils are far less harmful than bleaches, scouring powders or detergents, they are still toxic to marine life. Use cleaning products sparingly and minimize the amount discharged into the water. Never dispose of any cleaning products down the through-hull drain; dispose of them ashore.**

Product	Alternative
Bleach	Borax
Detergent & Soap	“Elbow grease”
Scouring Powders	Baking soda. Or rub area with one-half lemon dipped in borax, then rinse
General Cleaner	Baking soda and vinegar. Or lemon juice combined with borax paste
Floor Cleaner	One cup vinegar + 2 gallons of water
Window Cleaner	One cup vinegar + 1 quart of warm water. Rinse and squeegee
Aluminum Cleaner	2 Tbsp. cream of tartar + 1 qt. of hot water
Brass Cleaner	Worcestershire sauce. Or paste made of equal amounts of salt, vinegar, and water
Copper Cleaner	Lemon juice and water. Or paste of lemon juice, salt, and flour
Chrome Cleaner/Polish	Apple cider vinegar to clean; baby oil to polish
Stainless Steel Cleaner	Baking soda or mineral oil for polishing, vinegar to remove spots
Fiberglass Stain Remover	Baking soda paste
Mildew Remover	Paste with equal amounts of lemon juice and salt, or white vinegar and salt
Drain Opener	Disassemble or use plumber’s snake. Or flush with boiling water + one-quarter cup baking soda + one-quarter cup vinegar
Wood Polish	Olive or almond oil (interior walls only)
Hand Cleaner	Baby oil or margarine
Head & Shower Cleaner	Baking soda; brush thoroughly
Rug/Upholstery Cleaner	Dry cornstarch sprinkled on; vacuum

Adapted from Buller, Pat. 1995. Clean Marina +Clean Boating +Clean Water Partnership. Seattle, WA: Puget Soundkeeper Alliance.

For more information about the Clean Marina Program  
visit [www.njcleanmarina.org](http://www.njcleanmarina.org)