

Gray water management for houseboats and cabin cruisers

If you own and operate a houseboat or cabin cruiser, all wastewater (sewage) generated onboard needs to be managed and disposed of properly. Sewage is defined as both black water from toilets and marine sanitation devices as well as other wastewater sources generated by humans. Sinks, showers, hot tubs, and dishwashers are all examples of wastewater generating sources.

Why?

All vessel owners need to be mindful of what goes down the drain and should adopt environmentally friendly practices. The objective of this fact sheet is to raise awareness and educate houseboat and cabin cruiser owners on voluntary compliance (i.e., changes that result in environmental protection) to prevent gray water from discharging into waters of the state, which is prohibited.

Minnesota rules define gray water as containing harmful pollutants such as bacteria (e.g., fecal coliform, *E. coli*), viruses, fats, oils, grease, solids, phosphorus from soaps, and other chemicals used in wastewater generating devices.

These gray water discharges impact the quality of the water you, your family, and your friends swim and recreate on. During normal use and rental operation, the gray water sewage from sinks, showers, dishwashers, laundry, and hot tubs is not always collected in holding tanks and is directly discharged to the rivers and lakes. No one wants to swim in their toilet!

Who?

You! You can be the difference maker in stopping and reporting these discharges. It is prohibited to discharge untreated sewage into state waters. This applies to all privately owned and rented houseboats, cabin cruisers, and any watercraft that generates sewage. [Minn. Stat. ch. 86B](#) requires all watercrafts to have marine sanitation devices (MSDs).

How?

1. Discover where your gray water is plumbed to – is it directly into the waterbody you boat on or to an on-board holding tank?
2. Reduce your water use and use biodegradable soaps and no other chemicals.
3. Have your gray water generating devices replumbed to your black water tank.
4. If adding gray water to your black water tank, have them pumped more frequently.
5. Collect your gray water in buckets and haul to a proper disposal option.
6. Dispose of kitchen waste responsibly by clearing food scraps, oils, and fats from dirty dishes before washing to prevent scraps from entering drains.

7. Be mindful when using cleaning and toiletry products. These products contain nitrates, phosphates, and other chemicals, which can have a negative impact on aquatic ecosystems.
8. Reduce the amount/volume of water used on board a houseboat/cabin cruiser (e.g., shorter showers).

How can I help?

- Make as many changes as you can to promote healthy waters and protect yourself, family, and friends.
- Report any known or observed discharges of gray water or black water to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) at 800-657-3864. Collect information such as boat identification, license number, time, date, place, or any other helpful information.
- For more information, please contact the MPCA at 800-657-3864.

