

# 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 includes both black water, from toilets, and gray water from sinks, showers, hot tubs, dishwashers and laundry. The objective of this fact sheet is to raise awareness and educate houseboat and cabin cruiser owners to prevent all wastewater from discharging into streams, rivers and lakes, which is prohibited because it degrades the quality of our lakes and rivers.

## Why?

All vessel owners need to be mindful of what goes down the drain and should adopt environmentally friendly practices to ensure the waters you're recreating on are safe and clean. It's not just toilet water that we need to consider. Water from sinks, showers, hot tubs, dishwashers and laundry contains harmful pollutants such as bacteria (e.g., fecal coliform, *E. coli*), viruses, fats, oils, grease, solids, phosphorus from soaps, and other chemicals.

These gray water discharges impact the quality of the water you, your family, and your friends swim and recreate on. Water from sinks, showers, hot tubs, dishwashers and laundry should be collected instead of directly discharged to the rivers and lakes. No one wants to swim in their toilet!

## Who?

You! You can be the difference maker in protecting water quality. It is prohibited to discharge any untreated wastewater into state waters. This applies to all privately owned and rented houseboats, cabin cruisers, and any watercraft that generates sewage.

How can I help?

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. Replumb any sinks, showers, hot tubs, dishwashers, and laundry, etc. that discharge to the lake to your black water tank.
3. If adding gray water to your black water tank, have them pumped more frequently.

## If you're not able to replumb, collect your gray water in buckets and haul to a proper disposal location.

1. Reduce your water use and use biodegradable soaps and no other chemicals.
2. Dispose of kitchen waste responsibly by clearing food scraps, oils, and fats from dirty dishes before washing to prevent scraps from entering drains.

3. 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.
4. Reduce the amount/volume of water used on board a houseboat/cabin cruiser (e.g., shorter showers).

Make as many changes as you can to promote healthy waters and protect yourself, family, and friends. For more information, please contact the MPCA at 800-657-3864.

