Clean Boater Tip Sheet

Fuel and Oil

This boater used an absorbent towel to prevent drops of fuel from contaminating Lake Michigan.

Fuel and oil spills are not only unsightly and unpleasant smelling, they can cause significant harm to the environment. A single cup of spilled fuel or oil can contaminate an area the size of a football field. One quart of oil can create a slick over two acres, or three football fields, in size. Gas, oil, and other lubricants contain a potential pollutant known as petroleum hydrocarbons. These products also contain other toxic elements and metals. Over time, these pollutants settle to the lake or stream 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 on Indiana water, can be an active steward of this valuable resource by implementing these practices:

There are many absorbent products that catch drips and overflows, such as this fuel bib which slides over the fuel filler neck (Source: BoatU.S. Foundation).

Take Caution at the Fuel Pump

- Fuel your boat slowly and carefully.
- Attend the fuel nozzle at all times.
- Never "top off" your tank. Fuel expands as it warms.
- Listen. You'll hear a gurgling sound as the tank reaches full.
- Use your hand to feel for air escaping from the vent. An increase in air flow will happen as the tank approaches full.
- Use an absorbent fuel bib or collar at the fuel intake to capture spills or drips.
- Fuel portable gas tanks on shore where a spill is less likely to occur and easier to contain.
- Have a trained attendant fuel your watercraft for you.

Indiana Department of Environmental Management

Indiana Department of Natural Resources

Indiana Lake Michigan Coastal Program

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Handling Spills

- If you do have a spill while fueling, clean it up with an absorbent cloth. Dispose of the cloth appropriately.
- Do not use detergent to disperse the spill. This only exacerbates the problem.
- If fueling at a marina fuel dock and you have a spill, notify the fuel dock attendant or marina management immediately.
- Notify the U.S. Coast Guard National Response Center at (800) 424-8802 if there is a spill while underway.

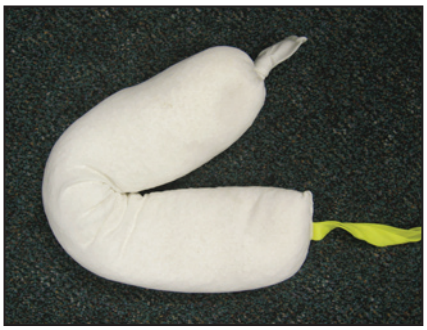
Absorbent Materials

- Reuse pads that are contaminated with fuel.
- Wring out pads contaminated with oil into an oil recycling container.
- Dispose of used absorbent materials according to the manufacturer recommendations or local regulations.

Bilges

Bilges can also be a significant source of pollution to the environment since they tend to collect fuel, antifreeze, oil, and transmission fluids. When the bilge is activated, these contaminants are pumped into the water.

- Use bilge socks to absorb oil in the bilge.
- Never discharge any bilge water that has an oily sheen.
- Maintain your engine to prevent spills and drips.
- Place a pan under the oil filter when doing an oil change or slip a plastic bag over the filter before removing it.
- Place an oil absorbent pad under the engine.



Bilge socks are used to prevent the discharge of oil and fuel into the marine environment (Source: Volusia County Environmental Management).

For More Information

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