

# Guideline for Marina Operators and Vessel Owners: Vessel Washing



This guideline was developed for marina operators, boat owners and charter vessel operators to promote best practice for vessel washing to protect our vulnerable coastal environments and Great Barrier Reef.

## How can this information help you?

Healthy waterways are important especially in the boating and marina industries. Pollution of waterways is not only bad for marine environments but also bad for tourism and boating.

This guideline focuses on addressing and preventing water pollution associated with vessel washing on water. By following this guideline, you will:

- Prevent pollution from vessel washing entering our waterways and marine environments
- Avoid causing environmental harm to our aquatic coastal environments
- Preserve our pristine environment that supports our coastal lifestyle and our region's tourism industry
- Avoid potential enforcement action such as fines

## Water pollution from vessel washing

Activities conducted in and around marinas can immediately pollute our coastal environments. Often marinas are designed in a manner that can cause pollutants to concentrate within their confines. Due to the high number of vessels located within a marina, vessel washing can be a significant contributor to this water pollution.<sup>1,2</sup>

Wastewater from vessel washing has the potential to release many types of chemicals that can be harmful to aquatic environments. Many cleaning products contain phosphates, alternative builders, chlorine, zinc, ammonia and other harmful chemicals.



Source: Joshua Sael

Many cleaning products are labelled as biodegradable. This means that the product can take up to 21 days for 80% of the mixture to be degraded (AS1792—Methods to Determine the Biodegradability of Surfactants). Decomposers, such as bacteria, have the ability to biodegrade many pollutants into different, less harmful compounds and are present in a healthy aquatic ecosystem. Their ability to break down pollutants in wastewater depends on the quantity and quality of the water released in the environment.<sup>3</sup>

Excess levels of these pollutants, particularly phosphates can cause rapid algal growth and impact our sensitive coral reefs that are adapted to low nutrient levels.

## What can you do to prevent water pollution?

Boat washing is essential for keeping vessels clean and in good condition. However, vessel washing can release various types of water contaminants or water pollution. The *Environmental Protection Act 1994* places legal responsibility upon all persons to ensure water contaminants are not released in waters or to a place that could be expected to move to stormwater system.

Practising proper vessel washing procedures can prevent water pollution and protect our marine and coastal environments. The best practice for vessel owners and operators **is not to release or discharge** any waste to the receiving environment.



Figure 1. Algal bloom at Hardy Reef August 2019.

# Best practices for washing your vessel

Best practices for washing your vessel include:

- ✓ Whenever possible, remove the vessel out of the water and wash the vessel on land where the wastewater can be collected and treated.
- ✓ To prevent the release of wastewater, use a spray cleaner that does not require a water rinse.
- ✓ Use micro-fibre cloths and steam cleaners to minimise the use of cleaning products.
- ✓ Whenever possible, use only water to clean your vessel.
- ✓ Use absorbent materials, such as a mop or sponge to remove or collect all wastewater.
- ✓ Collect and dispose of all wastewater to a location where water can be treated.
- ✓ Use recommended cleaning products for cleaning your vessel.



## Recommended Cleaning Products

The use of water, elbow grease and microfibre cloths are the best way to wash your vessel and prevent water pollution.<sup>1</sup> It is recommended to use natural detergents, and other products that are biodegradable, phosphate-free, and environmentally friendly.<sup>1,2</sup> Do not choose cleaning products that have:

- ✗ Hazardous chemicals (GHS09).
- ✗ Phosphorus (such as sodium tri-polyphosphates (STPP), and polyphosphates).<sup>2</sup>
- ✗ Alternative builders (such as zeolites (aluminosilicates), sodium citrate and nitrilotriacetate (NTA)).<sup>4</sup>

You can also look for disposal instructions under Ecological Information on the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) or Safety Data Sheets (SDS) of the product. You will see notes such as:

**“DO NOT discharge into sewer or waterways.”** or **“Avoid contaminating the waterways”**



## Share this knowledge

You can help maintain and protect the condition of coastal environments by educating and encouraging your customers, staff, fellow vessel owners and marina operators on how to appropriately wash their vessel. By practising and promoting the use and proper disposal of recommended vessel cleaning products (such as biodegradable and phosphate-free products, and environmentally friendly products) you can help to maintain the beautiful waters of the Whitsundays.

## References:

1. New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services 2005, *Guidelines for Marinas: Proper Boat Washing Procedures*, EPA, New Hampshire, United States of America.
2. Environment Protection Authority (SA) 2004, *Disposal of Soap and Detergents*, EPA, South Australia. SA Water 1997, *Industrial Wastes Vehicle Washing Policy*, South Australian Water Corporation, South Australia.
3. Environment Protection Authority (SA) 2016, *Stormwater Management for Wash Bays*, South Australia.
4. Environment Protection Authority (SA) 2008, *Code of Practice for vessel and facility management (marine and inland waters)*, EPA, South Australia.

## Where can I get more information?

Contact Whitsunday Regional Council  
1300 WRC QLD (1300 972 753)

[www.whitsunday.qld.gov.au](http://www.whitsunday.qld.gov.au)