

Vessel Sewage

Is Sewage a Problem?

Raw or poorly treated boat sewage is harmful to human health and water quality. Typhoid, hepatitis, cholera, gastroenteritis, and other waterborne diseases may be passed directly to people who swim in contaminated waters. People may also become infected by eating shellfish contaminated with viruses and other microorganisms contained in sewage discharge.

Sewage is harmful to water quality. Because the microorganisms within sewage need oxygen, any effluent discharged to waterways reduces the amount of oxygen available to fish and other forms of aquatic life. Furthermore, the heavy nutrient load in sewage promotes excessive algal growth. As the algae multiply, they prevent sunlight from reaching subsurface vegetation. When the algae die, they create another problem; the algae are decomposed by bacteria that further reduce levels of dissolved oxygen.

What Does the Law Say?

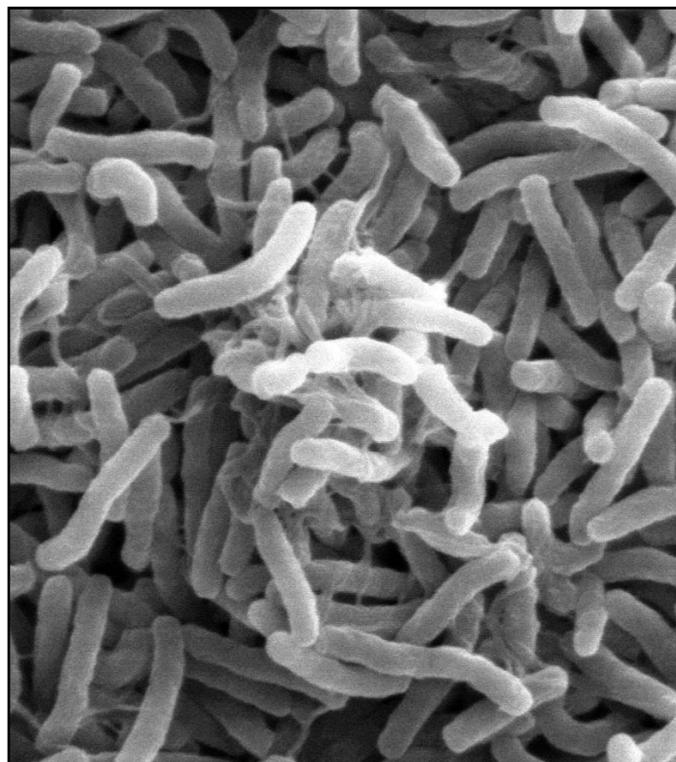
According to Federal and State law, it is illegal to discharge raw sewage.

What Can You Do?

Holding Tanks

Install a holding tank. Information explaining how to retrofit a boat to include a holding tank is available from various sources.

Use good plumbing to control holding tank odor. Fiberglass and metal tanks are highly resistant to permeation. Specially labeled flexible "sanitation hoses" and PVC piping are also highly impermeable. Hose runs should be as short and as straight as possible. Wherever practical, use rigid pipe below the level of the holding tank and in other areas where sewage will accumulate. Keep the number of connections to a minimum and ensure that seals are tight.



*Scanning electron microscope image of Vibrio cholerae bacteria, which infect the digestive system.
Photo Courtesy of Dartmouth College*

Use enzyme based products in your holding tank to further control odor. Enzymatic products use biological processes, rather than harsh chemicals, to break down sewage. Be sure to pump and rinse your holding tank prior to initial use of an enzyme product if you have used chemical-based, odor control additives in the past. Chemical residues may interfere with the effectiveness of enzyme-based products.

Avoid holding tank products that contain quaternary ammonium compounds (QACs) and formaldehyde. These products may disturb normal sewage treatment plant operations.