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# Certification

*for Boat Marine  
Sanitation Devices and  
Pump-Out Stations*

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TEXAS WATERWAYS



**FLUSH ZONE!**  
**NO DISCHARGE ZONE!**

[www.tceq.texas.gov/field/cleanwatercert](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/field/cleanwatercert)

**512-239-BOAT** (2628)

# What is the MSD Clean Water Certification Program?

**T**he Clean Water Certification Program requires owners of boats with marine sanitation devices (MSDs) and owners of pump-out stations to obtain a decal self-certifying that the MSD or pump-out station is operating properly to prevent the discharge of sewage into Texas waterways.

An MSD is any sanitation device, used on any boat, that is designed to receive, retain, treat, or dispose of sewage.

The program is required under Texas law and is intended to help protect and improve water quality.

## What does the rule require?

**T**he TCEQ rules, under Title 30 Texas Administrative Code, Chapter 321, Subchapter A, require that all houseboats and other boats with permanently installed toilets must:

- display evidence of TCEQ certification when operating on any state water body, and
- discharge MSD contents into an approved boat pump-out station or an adequately sized and permitted on-site sewage facility.

## Why is boat sewage a problem?

Most Texas waterways are either a source for public drinking water or used for contact recreation, such as swimming. When boat sewage is discharged directly into these waters, it can impact both human health and the environment.

### Health Risks

Boat sewage can introduce disease-causing microorganisms (bacteria, viruses, and protozoans) into the water.

These microorganisms are vectors for diseases such as hepatitis A, gastroenteritis, giardiasis, cryptosporidiosis, typhoid, and cholera.

### Environmental Problems

Boat sewage contains nutrients, such as nitrogen, that aquatic plants and algae can use to grow and spread in the form of blooms. These blooms can block the light needed by other aquatic life, creating an imbalance in the ecosystem. When the algae decays, it can deplete the water body of oxygen needed by aquatic organisms, killing fish.

Along the coast, shellfish beds can be affected by bacteria entering the water from boat sewage. The bacteria also consume oxygen needed by aquatic organisms.

Some chemicals used in MSDs to treat boat sewage, such as formaldehyde and chlorine, can be toxic to aquatic life.

### Economic Problems

When contaminant levels (bacteria, nutrients, etc.) are high, many swimming and fishing areas have to be closed or restricted. As a result, tourism and the ability to enjoy recreation on Texas waterways may suffer.

## What does the law say about discharging boat sewage?

Federal and state laws prohibit the discharge of both treated and untreated sewage into any no-discharge zone—an area of a water body or an entire water body where boaters are completely prohibited from discharging even treated sewage. These include:

- Texas waterways, including the Gulf of Mexico within three nautical miles,
- all inland freshwater lakes and rivers in Texas, and
- Clear Lake, which is currently the only coastal no-discharge zone in Texas.

## How should I properly manage boat sewage?

All boats with an installed toilet are required to have one of three types of approved MSDs.

Type I and II MSDs are flow-through systems that treat the sewage using chemical and mechanical methods before discharging the waste overboard. The operator of any boat with a Type I or Type II MSD must secure the device to prevent the discharge of treated or untreated sewage while located on a no discharge zone.

A Type III MSD is a holding tank. The operator of any boat with a Type III MSD must discharge the device contents into an approved boat pump-out station or an adequately-sized and permitted on-site sewage facility, or have the MSD contents removed by a registered sewage sludge transporter.



## What are the operating requirements for boat pump-out stations?

**T**CEQ rules (Title 30, Texas Administrative Code, Section 321.5) require that boat pump-out stations be designed, installed, and operated to prevent the accidental discharge of sewage.

Pump-out stations must be designed to:

- have a spill-proof connection with onboard holding tanks,
- have suction controls or vacuum breakers to limit suction to levels that prevent the collapse of rigid holding tanks,
- provide freshwater facilities for tank flushing,
- have a check valve and positive cutoff or other device to preclude spills when breaking connection with a vessel being serviced,
- provide adequate interim storage for wastewater, if required, before transfer to an approved sewage system for disposal,
- ensure that any connection to a drinking-water system has vacuum breakers or another device designed to prevent backflow or siphonage of sewage or contaminated water into the system, and
- (if mobile or floating) have adequate and spill-proof facilities for transfer to shore-based sewage systems or intermediate transfer facilities.



## Certification Fees

Certifications expire every odd-numbered year on December 31.

Type of Certification	Initial fee	Renewal fee
Marine sanitation device	\$15	\$15
Pump-out station	\$35	\$25

Certify your MSD or pump-out station online, <[www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/boat](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/boat)>, to receive your decals via mail.

### Get More Information

Online: [www.tceq.texas.gov/field/cleanwatercert](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/field/cleanwatercert)

Phone: **512-239-BOAT (2628)**



**Clean Water Certification Program**  
**Texas Commission on Environmental Quality**

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