

# Education to Prevent Small Oil Spills

## SMALL SPILLS, BIG PROBLEMS

Recreational boats and fishing vessels — not tankers and freighters — currently are the leading sources of known oil spills in Puget Sound.<sup>1</sup> Between 2011 and 2015, recreational vessels reported spills of almost 6,000 gallons of diesel and gasoline in Washington and many go unreported. About two-thirds of these discharges are one gallon or less.<sup>2</sup> Small spills, such as oily bilge discharge, accounted for an estimated 75 percent of the oil dumped into local waters over the last 10 years.

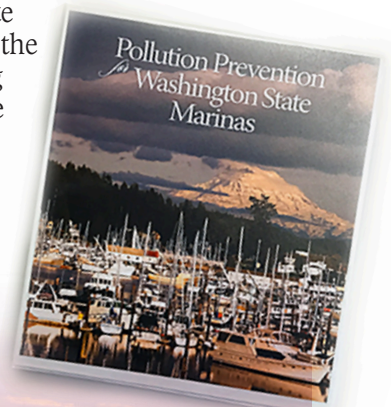
Small spills introduce persistent, toxic oil into our waters — often a few drops at a time. Even trace amounts of oil can damage marine life at fragile stages and threaten the vitality of aquatic ecosystems. Cumulatively, small spills also can undermine jobs and recreational pursuits that depend on clean water. While national attention and billions of public dollars are aimed at preventing or responding to large catastrophic spills, small oil spills receive little attention and are rarely cleaned up.

## PROTECTION THROUGH PREVENTION

As the largest contributor to oil contamination in the Puget Sound and a serious concern for other Washington waterways, small spills are an important element of overall prevention and preparedness. In 1991, Washington Sea Grant was tasked with establishing an education program that targets small oil spills from such sources as marinas, commercial fishing vessels and recreational boats. The primary goal of the Sea Grant education program today is to stop small oil spills at the source.

Washington's waterfront operators, fishermen and boaters understand the importance of keeping our waterways clean and can serve as the first line of defense against pollution. Their engagement is critical to the success of program tools and approaches, which include the following:

- **Small Oil Spills Prevention Kits** developed by Sea Grant contain a small absorbent pillow or pad, stamped with disposal instructions, that is placed alongside bilge pumps to prevent oily discharge from entering the water. The kits also may contain disposable, oil-resistant gloves and “Spills Aren’t Slick” brochures and stickers with reporting numbers. Over the past 18 months, about 2,000 spill kits have been distributed by Sea Grant staff, marina operators, Coast Guard Auxiliary vessel inspectors and yacht clubs.
- As a charter member of **Clean Marina Washington**, Sea Grant recruits new marinas and assists them in adapting best management practices to meet Clean Marina’s voluntary certification criteria. Today, 73 marinas throughout the state have earned the right to fly the Clean Marina flag, including two recent additions at Lake Chelan.
- Another recent Clean Marina success is production of ***Pollution Prevention for Washington State Marinas***, a new handbook that pulls together information on current laws,

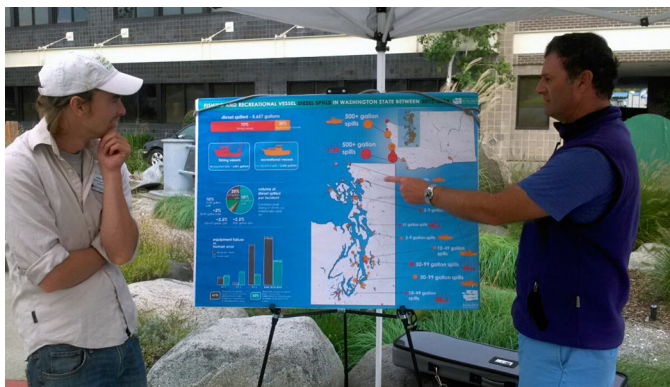


1. Captain Joe Raymond, Commander, Coast Guard Sector Puget Sound

2. Pollution Prevention for Washington State Marinas, [wsg.washington.edu/marina-handbook](http://wsg.washington.edu/marina-handbook), p.7







regulations and best practices for the marina industry. Sea Grant designed, edited, printed and helped write this well-researched, coherent and usable reference.

- **Waterfront facility visits and participation at trade shows and local festivals**, such as the Seattle Boat Show, Pacific Marine Expo and Port Townsend Wooden Boat Festival, offer the opportunity to talk directly to boat owners and operators about small oil spills. Hundreds walk away with improved awareness and tools for preventing pollution. This past summer, Sea Grant staff launched a focused outreach effort in the San Juan Islands.
- Working with Ecology and local Coast Guard officials and volunteers over the past two years, Sea Grant launched a **summer small spills prevention campaign** to raise boater awareness and provide knowledge and tools for stopping oil pollution. Campaign information was distributed through regional newspapers, trade publications and agency newsletters, reaching an estimated 170,000 readers.
- Over the years, Sea Grant has taught more than 100 **fishing vessel safety classes**, often in rural Pacific coastal and Columbia River locations where there are few training alternatives. Oil spill prevention is a key component of the curriculum.



#### PARTNERS IN PREVENTING SMALL OIL SPILLS

Clean Marina Washington  
 District 13 Coast Guard Auxiliary  
 Northwest Marine Trade Association  
 Pacific Coast Congress of Harbormaster and Port Managers  
 Pacific Oil Spill Prevention Education Team  
 Public and private marinas  
 Puget Soundkeeper Alliance  
 Recreational Boating Association of Washington  
 U.S. Coast Guard Puget Sound Sector  
 Washington State Department of Ecology  
 Washington State Parks

Washington Sea Grant, based in the University of Washington's College of the Environment, provides statewide marine research, outreach and education services, helping people understand and address the challenges facing our ocean and coasts. The National Sea Grant College Program is part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce. Visit [www.wsg.washington.edu](http://www.wsg.washington.edu) for more information or join the conversation with @WASeaGrant on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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