**NEWS RELEASE**

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**Small Spills, Big Problems, Sound Solutions**

*As the largest contributor to oil contamination in the Puget Sound, we must stop small vessel oil spills at the source.*

To paraphrase an old saying, “There’s no use crying over spilled oil.” Yet many are concerned with oil pollution in Puget Sound. What people don’t realize is that the biggest source of spills so far in the Sound has not been tankers and freighters, but small recreational and commercial vessels. Small spills, such as oily bilge discharge, account for 75 percent of the oil dumped into local waters over the last 10 years.

In the future, however, there may be a lot less to cry about, thanks to a simple remedy called the Small Oil Spills Prevention Kit consisting of a small absorbent pillow that is placed alongside bilge pumps to prevent oily discharge from entering the water. Washington boaters will be seeing and using a lot more of the kits in the coming months.

The Clean Marina Program, a partnership of the Puget Soundkeeper Alliance, the Northwest Marine Trade Association and Washington Sea Grant, has worked for 20 years to minimize small vessel spills. But this summer marks a change: for the first time the partners are targeting private boaters, rather than marina managers. Washington Sea Grant, the Washington Department of Ecology and Washington’s District 13 Coast Guard Auxiliary have launched the Small Spills Prevention Program to provide boaters with the knowledge and tools they need to stop oil pollution at the source. Last year, in a trial run, Washington Sea Grant Boating Program Specialist Aaron Barnett succeeded in distributing 1,000 spill prevention kits. This year that labor is bearing fruit: according to Coast Guard Auxiliary Instructor Mike Brough, more and more boaters are requesting kits after seeing their friends and other boaters use them. As Barnett explains, the success of the program depends on first, getting the kits out to boaters, and second, word of mouth—with boaters educating each other about oil spills.

**Pollution prevention, pollution management**

Washington boaters understand the importance of keeping our waterways clean. As frequent users of our region’s waters, they serve as the first line of defense against pollution and with the 2016 boating season now underway, this is an ideal time to set the Small Oil Spills program in motion.

Instructor Brough, a Seattle-based sailor and boating educator, is a leading proponent of the program. Brough recently handed out spill prevention kits at a local marina on National Marina Day. “It’s like handing out candy on Halloween,” he says. “Anyone with a bilge and inboard engine will take one. Boaters want to do the right thing, and these [kits] make it easier.”

Brough also got a chance to see the kits in action. “At the marina office, one boater was getting a new bilge sock to replace his old one,” he recounts. “The guy had gotten a crack in the lubrication oil line during a trip on the Sound. The broken line dumped a significant amount of oil into the bilge. The bilge sock he had been using caught all of the oil, and none went over board.”

Small spills can be expensive for boaters to clean up, and often cost is the first question boaters ask. In the state of Washington the kits are funded by the Barrel Tax and made available to boaters at no cost, through the Small Oil Spills Program.

**Getting your own kit**

This summer, the program hopes to hand out another 1,000 kits. Kits may be obtained during U.S. Coast Guard boat inspections or at marinas throughout the Puget Sound. If you or your organization would like to have kits sent directly to you, contact WSG’s Aaron Barnett at [aaronb5@uw.edu](mailto:aaronb5@uw.edu).

Washington Sea Grant, based at the University of Washington, 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](https://www.facebook.com/WaSeaGrant/), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/WASeaGrant) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/waseagrant/).