

Focus on Proposed Puget Sound Vessel Sewage No Discharge Zone



Water Quality Program

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What is a No Discharge Zone?

A No Discharge Zone (NDZ) is a designated body of water where the discharge of toilet sewage (black water) from boats, whether treated or not, is prohibited. There are 90 NDZs in 26 states. Washington has none. Ecology is proposing a new rule - Chapter 173-228 WAC, Vessel Sewage No Discharge Zones. It will establish a Puget Sound No Discharge Zone.

Why no discharge for Puget Sound?

Puget Sound is a unique, sensitive water body. Its limited tidal flushing makes it prone to poor water quality conditions. Many parts of the Sound have bacterial pollution that violates health-based state standards. In many of these areas, it is necessary to restrict the harvesting of shellfish. Very small amounts of sewage bacteria can make shellfish unhealthy to eat and water unsafe for people who come in contact with it.

Unlike pollution sources on land, vessels move throughout Puget Sound, creating the potential of discharges over or near sensitive areas such as shellfish beds and beaches. Consistent with the state's [Puget Sound Action Agenda](#), an NDZ can address this source of preventable pollution.

Most vessels with on-board toilets in Puget Sound – primarily smaller recreational boats – use holding tanks and empty these into pumpouts at marinas and boat ramps. Some vessels currently discharge into the Sound, and are allowed to do so with Marine Sanitation Devices (MSD). While these devices provide some disinfection, they do not perform at levels required to provide adequate protection to the Sound's shellfish resources and to protect public safety.

Ecology works to address many other sources of bacterial pollution, starting with municipal sewage, and including stormwater runoff, failing septic tanks, combined sewer overflows, industrial point sources, pet waste, and livestock.

WHY IT MATTERS

Sewage is pollution that harms water quality and public health.

If water has too much sewage bacteria, it can make shellfish unhealthy to eat, and it can endanger the health of people who come in contact with it.

Ecology's NDZ website:

www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/nonpoint/CleanBoating/nodischargezone.html

Ecology's NDZ Rulemaking website:

<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/ruledev/wac173228/1702ti-medocs.html>

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What is the status of this proposal?

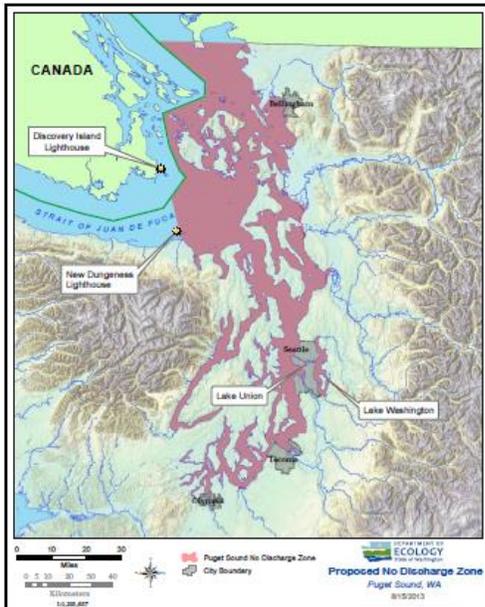
In 2016, Ecology submitted a final petition to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), seeking approval to establish a Puget Sound NDZ. States must take this step because the federal government otherwise has jurisdiction over vessel pollution. The EPA agreed to allow Washington to establish a Puget Sound NDZ. Federal law requires that for a state to establish an NDZ, the area must first have adequate facilities for vessels to pump out their sewage. The EPA found that Washington has more than the required ratio of pumpouts to boats and determined that the state may move forward with establishing a Puget Sound NDZ. We have begun rulemaking to define an area where vessels may not discharge any black water sewage. The decision to petition the EPA and proceed with rulemaking came after more than four years of evaluation and extensive stakeholder outreach that included seeking public comment on a 2014 draft petition.

Where can vessels discharge their black water?

The Puget Sound area has 153,000 registered recreational vessels and 3,600 commercial vessels. The same area has more than 173 pumpout units at 102 locations, and 21 mobile pumpout boats and pumper trucks available for recreational vessels. Puget Sound commercial vessels are served by more than 100 companies with septic pumper trucks, barges and a growing number of dockside stationary pumpouts.

Several of these pumpouts are for the exclusive use of specific fleets, such as state ferries, the U.S. Navy ships, Victoria Clipper vessels, Department of Corrections McNeil Island ferries, and the Alaska Marine Highway. The Port of Bellingham provides two pumpouts open to all commercial vessels. Two more pumpouts are being installed, one in Seattle for all commercial vessels and one at Bellingham, mostly for fishing vessels.

Commercial vessels also have access to several marine service companies that can provide sewage pumpouts with barges, trucks or poly tanks. Ecology is proposing a phased timeline for certain commercial vessels that currently rely on MSD treatment and would need to install or add capacity to on-board holding tanks.



Where would the NDZ be?

The proposed rule includes all the marine waters of Washington inward from the line between New Dungeness Lighthouse and the Discovery Island Lighthouse to the Canadian border, and fresh waters of Lake Washington, Lake Union, and connecting waters between and to Puget Sound. (See map).

How does a NDZ affect boaters and vessel operators?

Recreational boaters with existing holding tanks would continue to hold their sewage (black water) within the NDZ. They would either use pumpout facilities or discharge outside of the NDZ and beyond three miles from shore.

Recreational boaters with a Type I or Type II MSD would need to add a holding tank and not

discharge any treated or untreated sewage in the NDZ.

Commercial vessels would also need to hold their sewage, treated or untreated, while in the NDZ and either use a pumpout facility or discharge outside of the NDZ and beyond three miles or outside of the NDZ with a certified Type II MSD.

What about graywater?

The NDZ does not affect graywater discharges. Ecology's [Clean Green Boating website](#) has information on best management practices and requirements for graywater as well as other boat and vessel activities such as fueling, bilge care and hull cleaning.

NDZ rulemaking timeline

