

Puget Sound No Discharge Zone

Focus on Commercial Vessels

Puget Sound is a No Discharge Zone

It is illegal for any vessel to discharge sewage, whether treated or untreated, into the [Puget Sound No Discharge Zone \(NDZ\)](#). This law became effective on May 10, 2018 (Chapter 173 Section 228 of the Washington Administrative Code [[WAC 173-228](#)]).

There was a five-year implementation delay for four groups of vessels (tugs, commercial fishing, small commercial passenger, and NOAA research/survey vessels), to allow additional time to retrofit vessels with larger holding tanks. That delayed deadline of May 10, 2023, has now passed and all vessels must comply with the NDZ rule.

The only exemption to the NDZ rule is for public vessels that are actively involved in emergency, safety, security, or related contingency operations where it would not be possible to comply with the NDZ. As a reminder, the NDZ does not affect graywater discharges.

Why it matters

Puget Sound is a unique environment cherished by locals and visitors alike, both at shore and on the water. It is also a key part of Washington State's aquaculture industry.

Unfortunately, Puget Sound is prone to poor water quality conditions. We also know that Type I and II Marine Sanitation Devices are not effective at reducing bacteria levels in sewage to meet our state water quality standards. Sewage discharges from vessels, which are more concentrated than what is discharged from a wastewater treatment plant, can contaminate and close shellfish beds, close swimming beaches, and impact water quality.

A No Discharge Zone helps prevent that pollution and its impact on people and the environment.

What is the NDZ boundary?

The Puget Sound NDZ includes all the marine waters of Washington State inward from the line between the New Dungeness Lighthouse (N 48°10'54.454", 123°06'37.004" W) and the Discovery Island Lighthouse (N 48°25'26.456", 123°13'29.554" W) to the Canadian border (intersecting at: N 48°20'05.782", 123°11'58.636" W), and fresh waters of Lake Washington, Lake Union, and connecting waters between and to Puget Sound.

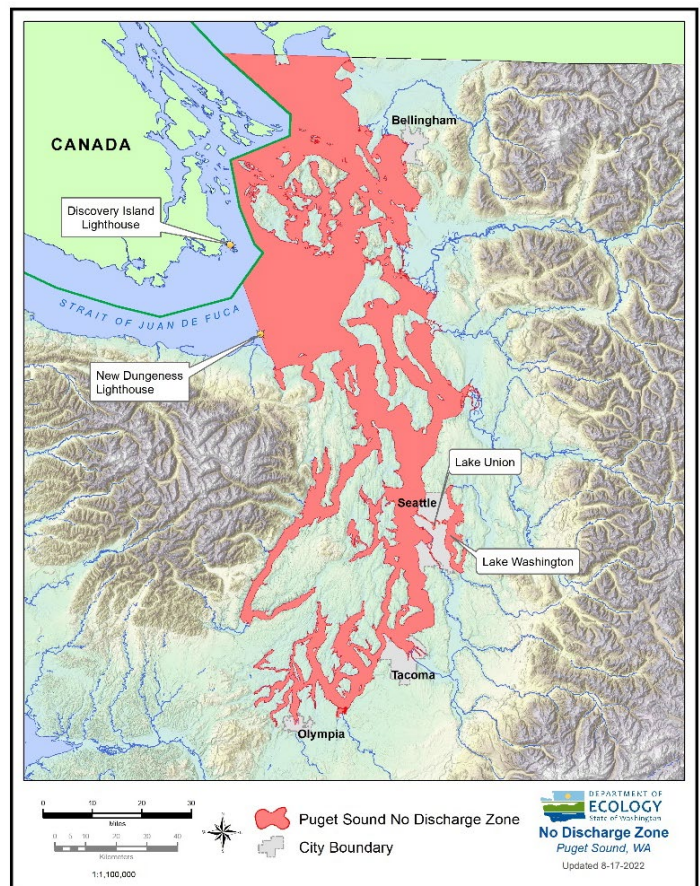


Figure 1: Puget Sound Vessel Sewage No Discharge Zone boundary

How to manage vessel sewage in the NDZ

Regardless of whether vessels are equipped with a toilet, marine sanitation device (MSD), portable toilet, or no toilet at all, sewage must not be released into the Puget Sound NDZ. Sewage management requirements in the NDZ are laid out in [WAC 173-228-040](#).

Here are our practical recommendations for how to meet those rule requirements:

If your boat has a Type I or Type II MSD:

To avoid deliberate or unintentional sewage releases, vessels with these MSDs should close their overboard discharge valves (often called a seacock) permanently and secure them. Methods of securing them in the closed position could include: removing the discharge valve's handle; padlocking the valve; or using a non-releasable tie (wire tie, zip tie) to secure the valve's position.

When the discharge valve is closed and secured, sewage is contained in a holding tank and should be pumped out at a proper onshore or mobile facility (see "Type III MSD" and "Resources").

If your boat has a Type III MSD (a holding tank):

To ensure that sewage is held onboard and inside the holding tank, keep the vessel's Y-Valve in the closed position. The closed position directs sewage from the holding tank to the deck waste fitting (which you can connect to a pumpout facility) instead of overboard. Once closed, secure the Y-Valve in that position using a zip tie or padlock, or remove the handle altogether. Some vessels may have a holding tank but not a Y-Valve, so it's important to understand how the system functions before operating a vessel.

Boaters should then use stationary pumpouts, mobile pumpouts, or pumping services (such as barges or trucks) to properly dispose of sewage.

If your boat is without an installed toilet:

It's important to remember that the NDZ rule still applies to all onboard sewage. Sewage collected in portable toilets, composting toilets or other containment devices (e.g., buckets) should be disposed of at an onshore facility like a restroom facility or dump station.

Helpful Resources

Pumpouts

Stationary pumpouts, onshore restrooms and dump stations can be found at pumpoutwashington.org. A convenient way to find pumpout locations while out and about is by using the free **Pumpout Nav** app.

Ecology has prepared a [list of commercial vessel sewage pumpout options](#) inside and around the Puget Sound NDZ. This resource also includes a list of mobile pumpout companies in the NDZ.

Maintenance is vital

Maintain your vessel's sewage management system to prevent leaks and malfunctions. You can periodically test the system by depositing a dye tab in the toilet, flushing, and looking for dye in the surrounding water. If dye is visible, have your boat checked to fix any issues. Ecology may be able to provide dye tabs; please reach out to the contact listed below.

Reporting illegal sewage discharges

All illegal discharges in the NDZ, including sewage, should be reported to Ecology's Environmental Report Tracking System (ERTS). Please call **206-594-0000** or email nwroerts@ecy.wa.gov and provide as much information as you can about the vessel and sewage release.

Enforcement

Ecology may enforce the NDZ rule by using any of the enforcement provisions in Chapter 90.48 in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW). In addition, other federal, state and local agencies may provide enforcement, as authorized.



Evan Dobrowski
evan.dobrowski@ecy.wa.gov
425-213-4230



To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 564-669-1889 or email at Thea.Angeli@ecy.wa.gov or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.