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Responsible Waste Disposal Onboard Boats

Written by Zuzana Prochazka

Equipping your boat for responsible waste disposal includes managing holding tanks and heads and can be easier with the right equipment. Today, our guest blogger, Ed McKiernan, a veteran of [Dometic Marine](#) sanitation, shares with us the history of the development of waterway waste laws and looks at how to make the whole waste disposal process more efficient. Also, check back tomorrow when I'll have a short overview of [Dometic's SailVac vacuum holding tank](#) designed specifically for sailboats and that works with VacuFlush toilet.

The increasing legislation concerning pump-out facilities and implementation of no-discharge zones throughout the world means that it is more important than ever to dispose of your waste responsibly and ensure your boat is fully equipped with the right sanitation gear to suit your cruising needs.

In the U.S., federal legislation was introduced in the 1970s requiring all U.S. boats fitted with a toilet to install either a holding tank or a treatment device to reduce the discharge of black water waste into areas of water that require greater environmental protection than others.

In the 1990s, the U.S. government partially funded the introduction of pump-out facilities in coastal marinas. The local governments then petitioned the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) to declare those waters a no-discharge zone, meaning toilet waste, treated or untreated, could not be discharged any longer. For boat owners, these new regulations meant that the frequency at which they had to return to a marina to pump-out on long cruises had increased and the need for a more efficient toilet or a larger holding tank became imperative.

With many European countries following suit by introducing their own discharge legislation, the global demand for modern sanitation systems that satisfy environmental issues as well as meet boaters' individual needs is understandably on the rise.

The use of an efficient toilet and holding tank system can provide significantly more capacity, enabling boaters to cruise longer between holding tank pump-outs, reducing costs and waste discharge. There are currently two types of flush technologies available for pump-out toilets, vacuum and macerating: each offering a range of benefits to suit different applications. For minimal water, electrical and holding tank usage, vacuum technology is recommended.

In a vacuum-flush toilet, similar to those found on airplanes, the vacuum, which is essentially air pressure, propels effluent through the piping connecting the toilet to the non-pressurized holding tank. Waste is transported by a burst of air, which means the system requires very little water consumption per flush when compared to other toilet types.

Vacuum-flush toilets are extremely relevant to boats with limited fresh water, electrical capacity or space for a holding tank. For example, [Dometic SeaLand's VacuFlush™](#) range on average consumes only 3 amps of power per flush and uses less than 1 pint (0.5 liters) per flush, so that the tank does not get filled with flush water. This provides boaters with significantly extended cruising time between pump-outs—up to 6 days for 2 people using an 80-liter tank.



VacuFlush 4800 Series

Whatever solution you choose, it makes both economic and environmental sense to manage waste responsibly. After all, no boater wants to swim in an area where untreated sewage may have been discharged or harm the surrounding marine environment. That means assessing your cruising needs, examining local regulations and resources and equipping your boat with the right gear.

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