



Q & A: Boat Draining, Drain Plugs, and Bait Container Draining

January 1, 2013

Draining and Drain Plugs

Q. What does the 2012 version of the “Drain Plug” law require?

A. The 2010 Minnesota Legislature passed a boat draining law that took effect on July 1, 2010. This law was created to reduce the risk of boaters spreading fish diseases (e.g., VHS) and life stages of aquatic invasive species (e.g., spiny waterfleas and zebra mussel larvae) that are not easily observed or detectable in water and could be transported to other waters. Often new infestations are not detected immediately, so there are risks of transporting water from **all waters** including from those in other states. In 2011 and 2012, the law was modified (Minnesota Statutes. 84D.10, Subd. 4) and as of July 1, 2012 it currently states,

(a) When leaving waters of the state a person must drain water-related equipment holding water and live wells and bilges by removing the drain plug before transporting the water-related equipment off the water access site or riparian property.

(b) Drain plugs, bailers, valves, or other devices used to control the draining of water from ballast tanks, bilges, and live wells must be removed or opened while transporting water-related equipment.

(c) Emergency response vehicles and equipment may be transported on a public road with the drain plug or other similar device replaced only after all water has been drained from the equipment upon leaving the water body.

(d) Portable bait containers used by licensed aquatic farms, portable bait containers when fishing through the ice except on waters designated infested for viral hemorrhagic septicemia, and marine sanitary systems are exempt from this subdivision...

Q. What do people need to do with water in bait containers?

A. The law requires all water to be drained from portable bait containers before leaving the water access or riparian property including bait containers that haven't been placed in lake or river water.

Q. How can I comply with draining portable bait containers when portaging from one lake to another?

A. If portaging a canoe or other watercraft, before reaching the new waterbody you will need to drain the water from the bait container on land where it won't drain into any water body and refill the bait container with water from the new water body. If you are carrying bait in a sealed oxygen pack, you may carry it to the destination water where you intend to use it. Once opened, and if leaving a waterbody, the water will need to be drained before reaching another water as above.

Q. Do the drain plugs need to be removed from pontoons on pontoon boats?

A. No, pontoons are air holding compartments and not intended to hold water. Plugs do not need to be removed from pontoons when transported, unless they are damaged and contain water.

Q. How long do the drain plugs need to be removed?

A. Drain plugs must be removed and water draining valves or devices in watercraft must be open the entire time that a watercraft is being transported. The one exception is for emergency response vehicles, such as boats used by law enforcement officers, only after the boats are drained.

Q. What should personal watercraft operators do to expel water from the impellers?

A. Personal watercraft operators should turn on the engine for 5 to 10 seconds after removing the watercraft from the water to expel the water and organisms inside the impeller.

Q. What if a wakeboard boat does not have a master drain plug for the ballast tank?

A. The ballast systems for wakeboard and ski boats vary depending upon the manufacturer. Some are designed to pump out all the water in the system and others require the operator to lift the ballast bags to ensure all the water is drained out. The tanks should be pumped until no water is expelled while the boat is in the water. Some have pumps that can be used out of the water. Boaters should consult with a boat dealer who sells their brand of boat for specific draining procedures.

Q. Are there exceptions for boats that are difficult to drain?

A. The DNR is aware that many different drain plug locations and styles exist, as well as assorted draining systems for livewells and ballast tanks. Even with those differences, all boats are subject to the law and there are no provisions in the law to allow waivers for specific boats or types of boats. In some situations, permits may be issued to transport water from infested water for larger inboard or inboard/outboard boats to avoid discharging bilge water into the lake that contains oil or other liquids that are illegal to discharge in to lakes and rivers.

Boaters with unique drain plug locations or other difficult draining situations are encouraged to consult with their local marine dealer or a local boat repair shop to resolve those situations by installing alternate drain plugs or valves. Many drain plug styles, ranging from about \$4 to \$15, are available at marine dealers. These are relatively easy to install by the owner or marine dealer.

Many of the drain plug systems are designed for removal of the plug from the outside of the transom (see photos), which may make removing the plug and reinstalling it at a water access easier than from the interior of the boat.

Note: The DNR does not endorse any particular styles or brands of drain plugs.



Q. If a boat does not have a drain plug can you get a ticket for not removing it?

A. No, there is not a state law that requires a drain plug. Boats must still be drained if there is no drain plug (e.g., using pumps, sponges, or turning over small boats and canoes).