



# Alaska Clean Harbors Program Making Waves for Healthy Coastal Ecosystems

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More than 70 percent of Alaska's population, which amounts to approximately 514,000 residents, resides along its 66,000 miles of rugged coastline, and calls these coastal communities' home. Within these communities, approximately 70,000 registered boats line the docks and occupy their harbors. Given the significant human activity in these areas, maintaining cleanliness and protection of the harbors is essential for ensuring the ongoing prosperity and well-being of the communities they serve, both economically and culturally.

Initiated in 2007 with support from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Cook Inlet Regional Citizens' Advisory Council, the Alaska Clean Harbors program is an impactful voluntary, non-regulatory program working throughout the state to help harbormasters, coastal communities, and boaters prevent pollution and reduce waste in harbors and waterways.

Presently, Alaska has three officially certified clean harbors: Juneau, Seward, and Valdez. Juneau and Seward successfully renewed their certification in 2023, while Valdez remains certified and is actively maintaining its status. With recertification required every three years, Homer and Sitka are next in line for renewal once their Clean Harbors status expires. Harbors working towards achieving their first initial certification this summer include Whittier, Dillingham, Yakutat, and Kodiak.



## **So, what does it take to become a certified Clean Harbor?**

The Clean Harbors program is for harbors both big and small. To attain certification as an Alaska Clean Harbor, a facility is required to conduct a self-assessment of their harbor and complete the Alaska Clean Harbors checklist. The checklist includes federal and state legal requirements, as well as harbor management practices aimed at pollution prevention and waste reduction at the marina and harbor area. Examples include providing a sewage pump-out station that is in working order and easily accessible, having spill response equipment on location, marked, and harbor staff trained in using it, and having trash bins conveniently located for boaters. Becoming an Alaska Clean Harbor entails proactive

communication between harbormasters, other harbor staff, and boaters utilizing the harbor and marina. While acknowledging that minor drips and spills may still occur, collaboration with Alaska Clean Harbors signifies a concerted effort towards positive change and enhancement of both water quality and harbor conditions.

New for 2024, is a tiered-certification approach in which harbormasters can apply for the Silver, Gold, or Platinum certification level based on the number and types of harbor management and pollution prevention activities achieved. This allows for more harbors to be recognized for their hard work in stewardship and is something that Alaska Clean Harbors committee member and DEC water quality specialist, Mary Inovejas is excited to see roll out.

“The new structure of the certification program is a great way to highlight harbors across the state that are actively working to reduce waste and prevent pollution, while keeping in mind the unique challenges Alaska harbors face,” said Inovejas. “With the tiered-certification approach, more harbors can be recognized for their hard work and stewardship.” The tiered approach makes becoming a certified Alaska Clean Harbor something that any harbor or marina in Alaska can work towards.

For more information on the Alaska Clean Harbors program and how to get involved click here: <https://www.alaskacleanharbors.org/>. The website is being updated to make information more easily accessible including quick and easy boat maintenance and operation tips for protecting water quality.



*Installed wooden inserts in recycling bins prevents spilling materials from spilling out in Slatter Harbor in Juneau, Alaska. Photo by Biz Wallace.*

*Title photo: Both fishing and recreation vessels line the docks of Homer Harbor in Homer, Alaska. Photo from DEC archives.*