

Frequently Asked Questions: Boat Draining, Drain Plugs, and Bait Container Draining

July 1, 2013

Q. What does the Aquatic Invasive Species Law require for draining boats and equipment?

A. The 2013 Iowa Legislature passed changes to the Aquatic Invasive Species Law regarding the draining of water from boats and equipment that took effect on July 1, 2013. The changes were developed to reduce the risk of boaters spreading plant fragments and life stages of aquatic invasive species (e.g., 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. The law currently states, (a) A person shall drain all water from water-related equipment when leaving the waters of the states and before transporting the water-related equipment off a water access area or riparian property.

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

(c) Emergency response vehicles and equipment engaged in emergency response activities are exempt.

(d) Marine sanitary systems, closed engine cooling systems, and containers of drinking water are exempt.

Q. What is meant by water-related equipment?

A. By definition in the law, water-related equipment means a motor vehicle, boat, watercraft, dock, boat lift, raft, vessel, trailer, tool, implement, device, or any other associated equipment or container, including but not limited to portable bait containers, live wells, ballast tanks, bilge areas, and water-hauling equipment that is capable of containing or transporting aquatic invasive species, aquatic plants, or water.

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 a water access or riparian property including bait containers that have not been placed in lake or river water. Dispose of unwanted bait in the trash. In order to keep bait for future use, replace bait water with tap, well, or spring water.

Q. What do people need to do with water in live wells?

A. The law requires all water to be drained from live wells before leaving a water access or riparian property. Transport fish on ice or clean onsite.

Q. How long do 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.

Q. What is the fine for not draining water from water-related equipment or transporting water-related equipment with drain plugs or valves in place?

A. The fine for draining-related violations of the AIS law is \$75.

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. 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. 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. 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).

Q. How can live fish be transported on a road to a tournament weigh-in location, to fishing events, or for other permitted activities?

A. Live fish can be transported in a tank or container filled with water from a clean source (e.g., well, spring, tap) that was kept away from the waterbody during fishing or fish collection. Because drain plugs, bailers, and valves of boats and other water-related equipment need to be removed or opened during transport, the clean water must be kept in the tank or container and not transferred to a live well.