

COUNTY OF LAKE
INVASIVE SPECIES INSPECTION PROGRAM
Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How serious is the threat of invasive mussels such as zebra or quagga mussels?

A: The zebra mussel and its close cousin, the quagga mussel, have become the most serious non-native biofouling pest to be introduced into North American fresh waters. An infestation causes mussel colonies to form on all surfaces including boats, engines, buoys, pipes, water intakes, ladders, beaches, native shellfish, adversely affecting the ecosystem and anyone who uses the lakes.

The most serious measurable economic impacts are suffered by water districts and other users of lake water who may have increased maintenance costs due to plugged water pipes, intake screens, and possible damage to pumps and other equipment. It even impacts citizens who don't use the lakes through increased costs for drinking water and food prices passed along to consumers by the water and agriculture industries brought on by their increased costs in maintenance and equipment repair. It impacts the local fisheries, and in some lakes, has caused a collapse in the populations of sports fish.

These mussels have the ability to tolerate a wide range of conditions and are extremely adaptable. Once they have infected a water body, they cannot be eradicated. They have no native predators. They cannot be prevented from spreading into downstream waters.

Q: Why did the Board of Supervisors enact this inspection ordinance?

A: These invasive mussels were introduced into the United States in 1988 in Lake St. Clair near Detroit, Michigan. The zebra mussel was believed to be released into the Great Lakes Region from the emptying of ballast water from a Eurasian vessel. So although they have been in the United States for 20 years, the zebra and quagga mussels are new to California. These mussels were first discovered in Lake Mead in January 2007, and quickly spread downstream into Lake Havasu, Lake Mohave, and then into Southern California via the aqueduct system. Since so many boaters come to Lake County from that region, the Lake County Board of Supervisors approved an ordinance to protect the water bodies of Lake County from this significant and imminent threat posed by invasive quagga and zebra mussel infestation that can be spread inadvertently through recreational boating.

Q: Have any lakes in California been infected with these mussels?

A: Yes. Lakes throughout the state are constantly being monitored, but as of April 1, 2008, 18 California water bodies had been infected. Some of them have been closed to boating traffic.

Q: How do I know if my boat needs to be inspected?

A: All vessels must undergo an inspection process prior to launching in Lake County waters.

Q: Do I need an inspection sticker if my boat is located in Lake County?

A: Yes. All vessels – regardless of where they are located – require an inspection sticker prior to launching on any water body in Lake County. Special inspection stickers are available to owners/operators of “local vessels.” These stickers are not subject to an expiration date, unless re-screening and/or re-inspection is required upon return to Lake County. Proof of a local vessel is required.

Q: How do I know if my boat is considered a “local vessel”?

A: Local vessels include any vehicle registered in Lake County or any non-registered vessel owned by a resident of Lake County. As part of the inspection process, you will need to show an acceptable form of proof that your vessel is local.

Acceptable forms of proof of local vessel may include:

- Valid driver’s license with a Lake County address
- Vessel registration certificate showing a Lake County address
- Utility bill indicating a Lake County residence
- Boat-slip lease agreement with a local marina or storage facility

Q: How do I get an inspection sticker if I have a local vessel?

A: Boats are not needed for the initial screening. As part of the inspection process, vessel owner/operators will be asked a few simple questions and will need to complete and sign an inspection form that includes an affidavit, pay a fee for the initial screening, and then an inspection sticker(s) will be issued, if appropriate. Instructions on where to affix the sticker will be provided with the sticker.

To streamline the process and save time, download the inspection form from the Lake County Mussel web site (www.co.lake.ca.us/mussels) and complete it in advance. Be sure to have your boat registration numbers (CF#) for ALL of your registered vessels that need a sticker. Also, be sure to have acceptable forms of proof of a local vessel.

If, during the initial screening, it is determined that a physical inspection of the vessel is required in order to obtain an inspection sticker, details will be provided as to where and when to take the vessel for the physical inspection.

For residents, here are a few important points to keep in mind...

- Boats are not required for the initial screening.
- To save time, download and complete the application form in advance.
- Be sure to have the boat registration numbers (CF#) handy.
- Be sure to have proof of local-vessel eligibility handy.
- Fees listed here apply to County-operated inspection locations only.

Q: How do I get an inspection sticker if I am bringing a boat in from outside of Lake County (a non-local vessel)?

- A. As part of the inspection process, vessel owners/operators must go through an initial screening. Vessel owner/operators will be asked a few simple questions, will need to complete and sign an inspection form that includes an affidavit, and pay a fee for the initial screening. If the vessel passes initial screening, an inspection sticker will be issued at that time. Instructions on where to affix the sticker will be provided with the sticker.

If the vessel does not pass initial screening, further inspection by a certified inspector may be required in order to obtain an inspection sticker. Details will be provided as to where and when to take the vessel for the physical inspection and any additional fees.

To save time, download the inspection form from the Lake County Mussel Web Site (www.co.lake.ca.us/mussels) and complete it in advance. Be sure to have your boat registration numbers (CF#) for ALL of your registered vessels that need a sticker.

Also, be sure to contact staff at your lodging establishment to find out if they offer inspection screening assistance. If not, they can direct you to the nearest boat inspection location and the hours of operation, or refer to the current list of locations on the Lake County Mussel hotline (707) 263-2556 and Lake County Mussel Web Site: www.co.lake.ca.us/mussels.

Q: Where can I go to get my inspection sticker(s)?

- A: If you are planning to launch your boat soon and require your sticker(s) immediately, several County-operated drop-in inspection locations are available (listed below). In addition, many local businesses such as lodging establishments, marinas, and bait shops also provide screening and/or inspection services.

Many local lodging establishments offer inspection screening assistance to their guests upon check-in, so be sure to inquire upon making a reservation. If they do not provide this service, they can direct you to the nearest boat inspection location and the hours of operation.

For the current list of boat inspection locations, call (707) 263-2556, or visit www.co.lake.ca.us/mussels.

County-operated drop-in inspection locations:

❖ **Department of Public Works**

Lake County Courthouse (3rd floor) 255 N. Forbes St., Lakeport
(707) 263-2341

Hours: 8 am to 5 pm, Monday through Friday

❖ **Department of Agriculture**

833 Lakeport Blvd., Lakeport
(707) 263-0217

Hours: 8 am to 5 pm, Monday through Friday

❖ **Lake County Visitor Information Center**

6110 East Hwy 20, Lucerne
(707) 274-5652

Hours: 9 am to 6 pm, Monday through Saturday (9 am to 7 pm, Friday);
10 am to 5 pm, Sunday

Q. Are any of the inspection locations open 24 hours per day?

A. Not at this time. However, many local businesses offer expanded hours for those who want to launch early in the morning or late in the evening. In addition, staff members at many local lodging establishments are able to offer inspection screening assistance to their guests upon check-in, so be sure to inquire upon making a reservation.

Q: Can I obtain my inspection sticker(s) through the mail?

A: If you don't require your inspection sticker(s) immediately, you may choose to use the mail-in option. Just download, complete, and sign the application, and mail it along with copies of proof of local vessel and payment for the initial screening fee. Your sticker(s) will be mailed to you via certified mail.

Make checks payable to Lake County Department of Public Works, and mail to:
Lake County Department of Public Works, Room 309
255 N. Forbes St., Lakeport, CA 95453

Important Note: If you choose to use the mail-in process, expect delays in getting your sticker(s).

Q: How much does it cost to get an inspection and inspection sticker?

A: All vessels must undergo an initial screening to determine whether a sticker may be issued at that time or whether further certified inspection is required.

Effective July 1, 2008, County-operated screening and inspection services require fees as follows (fees established per County Ordinance 2866):

Initial screening fee: The fee for initial screening by County personnel is \$10.

If a water vessel passes initial screening, an inspection sticker will be issued. If a water vessel does not pass initial screening, further inspection by a certified inspector will be required.

Certified inspection fee: If a vessel requires further inspection by a certified inspector, the fee for a certified inspection by County personnel is based on the length and type of water vessel, as follows:

- Vessels up to 12 feet in length: \$15
- Vessels from 12 to 18 feet: \$25
- Vessels 18 feet and longer: \$40
- Vessels that contain ballast tanks and/or bladders shall be charged an additional \$20 per inspection

If a water vessel passes certified inspection, an inspection sticker will be issued. If a water vessel does not pass certified inspection, the vessel will not be allowed to launch until the vessel has been decontaminated and re-inspected by a certified inspector.

Q: What are the fees at other non-County-operated inspection locations?

A: The fees listed herein apply to County-operated screening and inspection locations only. These fees do not reflect pricing for screening and inspection services performed by non-County-operated facilities, such as lodging establishments, marinas, bait shops, etc. These facilities may charge more or less for these services, depending on their costs to provide the services. Be sure to inquire in advance as to their fees.

Q. What types of water vessels require inspection?

A. All registered and unregistered vessels are required to have an inspection sticker. This includes motorized and non-motorized vessels, such as power boats, sailboats, kayaks, canoes, jet skis, inflatable rafts, float tubes, etc.

Q. How long will the inspection take?

A. It varies depending on how the boat has been operated in the past 30 days, and how diligent the owner/operator was in cleaning, draining, and drying when exiting the previous water body. Owners/operators can streamline the process by saving receipts or certificates documenting any recent cleanings/and or inspections.

Q. What parts of the boat and trailer will be inspected?

A. This depends on various risk factors, but all parts of the boat must be cleaned, drained, and dry. This includes live wells, bait wells, bilges, and areas likely to contain water. If the boat is determined to be a higher-risk vessel, a thorough boat and trailer inspection by a certified inspector may be necessary.

Q. Will I be required to remove panels and floor boards from my boat during the inspection?

A. The bilges, live wells, bait wells, and any other areas that collect water MUST be cleaned, drained, and dry. The inspector must be able to ensure this.

Q: What is the penalty for launching a boat without a sticker?

A: Violations of this law may be treated as an infraction, misdemeanor, and even a public nuisance. This means a violator faces monetary penalties, the possible impoundment of his/her vessel, and in some cases, incarceration in County Jail.

Q: My patio boat has been in the waters of Clear Lake for years, do I need to pull it out of the lake and have it inspected?

A: Probably not, but this will be determined through the initial screening process.

Q. Where will the sticker be attached?

A. For registered vessels, the sticker should be affixed on the starboard (right) side of the boat, 6 inches in front (forward) of the registration number. For unregistered vessels such as kayaks or canoes, the sticker should be affixed in a prominent location toward the front of the boat. Vessels with special requirements will be instructed as to acceptable alternate display locations.

Q. How long is the sticker valid?

A. Inspection stickers for non-local (visitor) vessels are valid through the end of the calendar year in which they are issued. Inspection stickers for local vessels are not subject to an expiration date.

Q. Must a boat be re-inspected every time it enters Lake County?

A. Yes.

Q. What are the fines if I am cited for not having a valid sticker?

A. Penalties are administered in relation to the offense. Fines begin at \$100 although administrative penalties plus a misdemeanor can be charged on the first offense.

Q. If it is determined my boat must be decontaminated, where do I go?

A. The inspector will make a determination on the extent of decontamination needed for the boat to pass inspection. If the level of decontamination needed exceeds what can be done through recommended procedures, the boat may not be launched in Lake County. Currently, no decontamination facilities are in operation in Lake County. Local decontamination stations are anticipated to be in operation in July.

Q. What does decontamination of my boat consist of and what is the cost?

A. The decontamination process includes power washing with very hot water, flushing of the motor cooling system, draining, and drying of any standing

water including bilges, ballasts, and bait wells, etc. The cost will be determined by the business or agency operating the station.

Q. Are Lake County boat owners required to have an inspection sticker?

A. Yes.

Q. If my boat has never left Lake County, will it have to be inspected?

A. Probably not, but this will be determined through the initial screening process.

Q. I am a Lake County resident with a “local vessel.” If I take my boat out of Lake County, must it be re-inspected upon my return? If so, will I have to pay another screening and/or inspection fee?

A. By signing the inspection application and affidavit, you agree to clean, drain, and dry your vessel every time you remove it from any water body you visit. If you have not taken your boat out of the state or south of Los Angeles, most likely, re-inspection is not needed. If, however, any question exists, please call the Lake County Mussel Hotline and someone will be happy to review your boating history to determine whether your vessel poses a threat and should be re-inspected.

Q. I visit Lake County frequently and bring my boat. Once I have my inspection sticker, will I need to have my boat re-inspected each time I return? If so, will I have to pay another screening and/or inspection fee?

A. By signing the inspection application and affidavit, you agree to clean, drain, and dry your vessel every time you remove it from any water body you visit. If you have not taken your boat out of the state or south of Los Angeles, most likely, re-inspection is not needed. If, however, any question exists, please call the Lake County Mussel Hotline and someone will be happy to review your boating history to determine whether your vessel poses a threat and should be re-inspected. If it is determined that re-inspection is required, you will need to pay for that physical inspection.

Q. Will I be allowed to release live minnows and other live bait in the water when I am done fishing?

A. No. Disposal of live bait and bait water is strictly prohibited.

Q: What do I do if I see someone ready to launch without a sticker?

A: Call the Lake County Mussel Hotline at (707) 263-2556. If possible, please note the boat CF# and/or vessel description.

Q: Where can I obtain more information about the inspection program?

A: Call the Lake County Mussel Hotline at (707) 263-2556 or visit:
www.co.lake.ca.us/mussels.