

Invasive Species FAQ

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 pests 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, aquatic vegetation, 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 sport 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 predators native to the US. They cannot be prevented from spreading into downstream waters.

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

A: These invasive mussels were introduced into the United States in 1988 in Lake St. Clair near Detroit, Michigan. The mussels are believed to have been 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.

The quagga mussel was 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. The zebra mussel was first discovered in San Justo Reservoir, San Benito County in January 2008. Since so many boaters come to Lake County from southern California, 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 infested with these mussels?

A: Yes. Lakes throughout the state are constantly being monitored, and as of January 13, 2010, 23 California water bodies had been infested. 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 a screening process prior to launching in Lake County waters.

Q: Do I need inspection stickers if my boat stays in Lake County?

A: Yes. All vessels – regardless of where they are located – require inspection stickers or compliance bands prior to launching on any water body in Lake County. Resident inspection stickers are available to owners/operators of vessels whose DMV registration identifies that vessel as being located in Lake County.

These red stickers are not subject to an expiration date, unless inspection is required upon return to Lake County. DMV registration is required.

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

A: Local vessels include any vessel with a DMV registration that identifies the vessel as being physically located in Lake County. As part of the screening process, you will need to show your DMV registration.

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

A: Boats are required for the screening, so that screeners can determine whether they are CLEAN, DRAINED and DRY. As part of the screening 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 screening, and then inspection stickers will be issued, if appropriate. Instructions on where to affix the stickers will be provided with the stickers.

To streamline the process and save time, download the inspection form from this mussel web site and complete it in advance. Be sure to have your boat and your DMV registration with you at the screening.

If, during the screening, it is determined that a physical inspection of the vessel is required in order to obtain inspection stickers, 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 required for the screening.
- To save time, download and complete the application form in advance.
- Be sure to have the boat registration handy.
- Fees listed here apply to County-operated inspection locations only.

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

A: Vessel owners/operators must go through a screening process with their vessels so that screeners can determine whether the vessels are CLEAN, DRAINED and DRY. 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 screening. If the vessel passes screening, compliance bands will be issued at that time. Instructions on where to attach the bands, one to the vessel and one to the trailer, will be provided with the bands.

If the vessel does not pass screening, further inspection by a certified inspector will be required in order to obtain compliance bands.

To save time, download the inspection form from this mussel web site and complete it in advance. Be sure to have your boat registration with you.

Also, be sure to contact staff at your lodging establishment to find out if they offer the screening service. If not, they can direct you to the nearest screening location and the hours of operation, or refer to the current list of locations on this mussel web site or from the mussel hotline (707) 263-2556.

Q: Where can I go to get my inspection stickers/compliance bands?

A: Many local businesses such as lodging establishments, marinas, and bait and tackle shops provide screening and/or inspection services.

Many local lodging establishments offer a screening service 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 screening location and the hours of operation.

For the current list of screening/inspection locations, call (707) 263-2556, or see the List of Screening Locations on this web site.

County-operated screening locations:

▮ **Department of Agriculture**

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

Hours: 8 am to 4:30 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 screening 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 screening assistance to their guests upon check-in, so be sure to inquire when making a reservation.

Q: Can I obtain my inspection stickers through the mail?

A: No. The screening process requires that the vessel be present in order that the screener can determine whether the vessel is CLEAN, DRAINED and DRY.

Q: How much does it cost to get a screening and inspection stickers or compliance bands?

A: All vessels must undergo a screening to determine whether they are at risk for transporting invasive mussels. Mussel stickers or compliance bands may be issued at that time or at a later time when further certified inspection is required. Since January 1, 2010, County-operated screening and inspection services require fees as follows (fees established per County Ordinance 2915):

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

If a water vessel passes screening, inspection stickers or compliance bands will be issued. If a water vessel does not pass screening, inspection by a certified inspector will be required.

Certified inspection fee: If a vessel requires 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, mussel stickers or compliance bands 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 non-County-operated screening/inspection locations?

A: The fees listed herein apply to County-operated screening and inspection services 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 screening/inspection?

A. All registered vessels are required to have inspection stickers or compliance bands. This includes motorized and non-motorized vessels, such as power boats, sailboats, and personal watercraft. It does NOT include canoes, kayaks, car-top boats, float tubes, rafts, wind surfers/boards, and boogie boards.

Q. How long will the screening/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 checked during screening?

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 screening?

A. The bilges, live wells, bait wells, and any other areas that collect water MUST be cleaned, drained, and dry. The screener will ask the vessel owner/operator to verify this.

Q: What is the penalty for launching a boat without stickers or compliance bands?

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 screening process.

Q. Where will the mussel stickers be attached?

A. Mussel stickers shall be affixed to all Lake County resident, DMV registered vessels. They should be affixed on each side of the vessel, 6 inches in front (forward) of the registration number.

Q. How long are the mussel stickers valid?

A. Mussel stickers (resident stickers) are not subject to an expiration date.

Q. Where will the compliance bands be attached?

A. Compliance bands shall be affixed to all non-resident, DMV registered vessels. They should be attached to the front one third of the vessel in a prominent location, preferably, the boat hook; and to the rear of the vessel's trailer.

Q. How long are the compliance bands valid?

A. Compliance bands for non-resident vessels are valid for the calendar month issued. There is a five-day grace period at the beginning of the month.

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

A. Yes.

Q. What are the fines if I am cited for not having valid mussel stickers or compliance bands?

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 screener will make a determination on the extent of decontamination needed for the boat to pass inspection. Details will be provided as to where and when to take the vessel for the physical inspection and any additional fees. Currently there is one decontamination unit in Lake County at Lakeport Camper and Truck.

Q. What does decontamination of my boat consist of?

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. Hard to treat equipment that cannot be exposed to hot water can be treated with 100% vinegar for 20 minutes or 1% table salt for 24 hours.

Q. Are Lake County boat owners required to have mussel stickers?

A. Yes.

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

A. Yes.

Q. I am a Lake County resident with a “local vessel.” If I take my boat out of Lake County, must it be re-screened 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 taken your boat out of county to another water body, re-screening is required. If you have any questions, please visit a resort or fishing business that is participating in the county program, and someone will be happy to review your boating history to determine whether your vessel poses a threat and should be inspected. No, you will not pay another fee for a re-screening but will pay a fee for an inspection if required.

Q. I visit Lake County frequently and bring my boat. Once I have my compliance bands, will I need to have my boat screened 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 taken your boat out of county to another water body re-screening is required. If you have any questions, please visit a resort or fishing business that is participating in the county program, and someone will be happy to review your boating history to determine whether your vessel poses a threat and should be inspected. No, you will not pay another fee for a re-screening but will pay a fee for an inspection if required.

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 mussel sticker or compliance band?

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 the [Lake County Invasive Mussel Prevention Program website.](#)

*Provided by the Lake County Department of Water Resources.