



Rhode Island Fiberglass Vessel Recycling (RIFVR) Pilot Project

THE CHALLENGE: Every year in the U.S. an increasing number of recreational fiberglass boats reach their end of life without a sustainable option for disposal. Some will be crushed and buried in landfills, where they will persist for many years, while others may be abandoned by their owners on land or in coastal areas where they can potentially harm the natural ecosystem.

Between 2003 and 2012 an estimated 1.5 million recreational craft were retired in the U.S. This rate of disposal is not expected to slow down, as many first-generation fiberglass boats (launched 1970s-90s) have begun to reach their end-of-life status.

This is a serious challenge facing boat owners, state governments, and the national marine-trades industry.

THE PROJECT: Rhode Island has taken the lead in searching for a solution. Rhode Island Sea Grant and the Rhode Island Marine Trades Association (RIMTA) studied efforts in Europe to combat the same issue for two years before launching a pilot program called the Rhode Island Fiberglass Vessel Recycling (RIFVR) Pilot Project. This pilot will explore solutions for the sustainable disposal of fiberglass boats by dismantling and re-processing of fiberglass hulls into cement as an alternative to landfill.

The scope of the project includes:

- Pilot the dismantling and processing activities of 20-30 metric tons of fiberglass vessels in partnership with local boatyards.
- Partner with local, state, and federal agencies to design the process to meet all health and safety requirements.
- Conduct an economic analysis of the pilot program to determine long-term feasibility.
- Investigate legislation and regulations necessary to support fiberglass hull recycling.
- Document lessons learned and develop resources to aid in fiberglass vessel recycling programs throughout the U.S. and globally.

BRINGING LESSONS LEARNED TO OTHER AREAS OF THE COUNTRY: Documentation and evaluation of best management practices will be ongoing during the project. In order to inform marine and composites industry professionals in other areas of the country about lessons learned to date, members of the RIFVR Pilot Project team have been giving presentations at major conferences.

An update on the pilot was shared at the Sixth International Marine Debris Conference, coordinated by NOAA and UN Environment, which was held in California in March 2018. Members of the team will also give a presentation at IBEX, the largest marine-industry trade event in North America, which takes place in Florida in October 2018.

QUOTE FROM EVAN RIDLEY, PROJECT MANAGER: “We are continuing to answer critical questions surrounding the lifecycle of recreational boats and the sustainable reuse of fiberglass waste. Boats constructed with composite materials offer an incredible opportunity for our state to establish a new network for the collection and recycling of high-value waste derived from thousands of other composite-based products currently being landfilled. These efforts stretch beyond the sustainability of recreational boating and provide a foundation for the expansion of our circular economy in the Ocean State.”

FUNDING: This Pilot Project has been made possible with support from 11th Hour Racing, the Association of Marina Industries, Boat U.S. Foundation, and the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation. Project organizers are actively seeking further funding from stakeholders inside and outside the marine and composites industries.

For more information:

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