



# Don't Be a Boat Ramp Hog

**Ever pulled up to a boat ramp in Alabama, ready for an enjoyable day on the water, to find an inconsiderate boater has blocked the entire ramp while loading or unloading gear?**

If so, you have just encountered a “boat ramp hog,” according to Lt. Erica Shipman of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources’ Marine Police Division.

Just like people deplore “line jumpers,” boaters and anglers detest people without common courtesy at the boat ramp.

“Boat ramp etiquette is a serious issue for many boaters,” Shipman said. “There have actually been fights – could this be ramp rage – that have erupted because someone was being a ‘boat ramp hog’ and tied up the ramp for too long a period.”

## Launching Tips

Shipman said the Marine Police officers teach techniques in their safe boating classes that ensure a swift and successful boat launch that will keep everybody happy.

“Develop a launch routine and mental checklist that works and stick with it,” Shipman said. “That way if you are rushed you won’t forget something – like putting in the plug. Your routine should include pre-launch, launch and retrieval/loading. And make sure you take care of your pre-launch preparations prior to getting on the ramp.”

## Pre-launch preparations include:

1. Remove the tie-downs that secure the boat to the trailer. Do not remove the winch line from the bow eye (more on this later).
2. Load all equipment from the vehicle to the boat. This includes fishing gear, coolers, life jackets – anything you will use needs to be loaded onto the boat prior to the boat getting on the ramp.
3. Put in your drain plug.
4. Unplug your trailer lights if they are not sealed and waterproof.
5. Pump the fuel primer bulb if you have one, put the key in the ignition, and check the battery to make sure it is still live.
6. If launching with more than one person, put the other person in the boat, so they can drive it off the trailer once launched.
7. If launching with only one person, attach the bow or docking line to the trailer or vehicle. This will keep the boat from floating away if the trailer is backed in too far.

Once it is your turn to launch, back down to the water and just before water entry, unhook the trailer winch line, Shipman suggests.

“I was with someone who disengaged the winch line at the top of the ramp and started to back down,” she recalled. “It was not a really steep ramp, but about halfway down, the boat slid off the trailer onto the middle of the boat ramp. The ramp was tied up for about six hours, until a tow truck could come and move the boat. And

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve seen someone with the tie-downs still fastened gunning the boat motor over and over, baffled as to why the boat is not moving.”

A single launcher should back into the water until the boat just barely starts to float, then untie the bow line. Then the boater should climb into the vessel and move it to the courtesy dock, then come back and move his vehicle.

## Other Tips

Don’t tie up the courtesy dock longer than absolutely necessary, especially if the boat is blocking one of the ramps. If boaters are waiting to use the ramp or dock and there is a person available capable of driving the boat, move the boat away from the dock and then return to the dock to pick up the tow vehicle driver.

“If you are not experienced towing and backing a boat, practice, practice, practice before going to a ramp,” Shipman said. “Even experienced boaters often feel the pressure to perform when launching at a crowded ramp.”

After the day of fun on the water ends, tired boaters may also have short tempers. Therefore, when loading at the end of the day, do not unload the vessel until after you move from the ramp area. At this time, pull the plug, put on the tie-downs, and transfer equipment from the boat to the vehicle.

“Courtesy and boat ramp etiquette are the responsibility of everyone who uses the numerous ramps on Alabama’s waterways,” Shipman said. “But with practice, preparation and a good launch/load routine, boaters can start and end their day on a high note.” **DA**