GUIDE

Deep Cleaning RV Wastewater Holding Tanks

Without regular deep cleaning, waste can find ways to hide in the crevices and low points of your tank and potentially cause clogs and foul odors. Whether you currently have a problem or just want to practice good tank care habits, deep cleaning your tanks is a great place to start. If definitely have a clog either in your tank or in your toilet right now, we recommend referring to the following guides that will help you diagnose the specific problem, how to fix that problem, and what you need to do going forward to avoid those same issues in the future:

- Clearing RV Toilet Clogs
- Preventing Clogs in Your RV Holding Tank

Deep cleaning your black and gray holding tanks regularly is one of the ways to prevent future problems from arising at the worst time. We'll show you how easy it is to perform a deep cleaning with minimal effort.

Deep Cleaning an RV Black Tank

Deep cleaning RV black water tanks is very important because it helps loosen any clingy waste that was not removed with regular dumps and flushes. We recommend performing a deep clean on your black tank twice per year: once at the beginning of the RVing season and once at the end, or every 5-10 dumps for full-time RVers. Our already-assembled Biannual Tank Maintenance Pack includes everything you'll need (except a rinsing wand) to deep clean your tank twice a year. If your RV is stationary and rarely moves, it's a good idea to perform a deep clean like this every 60 days since waste tends to easily accumulate when it never or rarely sloshes around. If this doesn't solve odor or waste buildup problems, feel free to contact us any time and we will try to help you solve the issue.

Supplies you'll need to deep clean:

- Water
- A bacteria-based cleaner (we recommend Unique Tank Cleaner)
- Time

Procedure

1. **CLOSE YOUR BLACK TANK VALVE.**
2. **Fill your black tank with water**; you can only clean what the water is touching, so the more water you add, the more effective the cleaning.
3. **Dump 1 entire bottle of Unique Tank Cleaner into your 40-gallon black tank by pouring it through your toilet (let it sit in the tank for 12-72 hours).**

   Note: The longer you let it work the better, and no amount of time or product is too long or too much. Class B RVs and others with smaller tanks may need less than one bottle of Tank Cleaner to provide sufficient cleaning; if you have a tank larger than 40 gallons, you may consider using more Tank Cleaner.
4. **Open your black tank valve and dump your tank.**
5. **Rinse your tank thoroughly.**
   - If your RV comes with a built-in tank rinser (or flusher), it's best to run it for about 30 minutes or until the tank is thoroughly rinsed out.
   - If you don't have a built-in rinser, we recommend using an RV holding tank cleaning wand or external tank rinser that connects to your discharge line.
6. **CLOSE YOUR BLACK TANK VALVE.**
   Always keep your black tank valve closed unless you're dumping!

Deep Cleaning an RV Gray Tank

If you think your black tank will likely be the only culprit when it comes to unpleasant smells inside your RV, your gray or galley tank(s) can also produce offensive odors as a result of the build-up of soap scum, food grease, lotions, or even human hair from the shower. This can cause more than just unpleasant odors; it can also lead to misreading sensors. Because there aren't a lot of solids inside your gray tank (at least, there shouldn't be), restoring your gray tank to its full glory is as easy as removing the grease that has built up inside the tank!

From our experience with customers, the best product out there for removing gray tank grease residue is Dawn Ultra dish soap. Even though it seems like adding more soap to a gray tank that is already coated in soap scum and grease doesn't make sense, Dawn Ultra is a completely safe, very effective grease eater and doesn't leave a residue layer like other soaps. And the upside is that whether you are a full-timer or weekend warrior, Dawn Ultra will do the heavy-lifting overnight while you sleep.

Supplies you'll need to deep clean:

- Water
- Grease-eating dish soap (like Dawn Ultra)
- Time

Procedure

1. **Close your gray tank valve.**
2. **Fill your gray tank all the way to the top with fresh water**; you want water to cover all the areas you want cleaned because only the parts of the tank at or below the waterline will be cleaned. If you want to restore your gray tank sensors, be sure that water covers the highest sensor in your gray tank.
3. **Pour at least 20 ounces (or more) of Dawn Ultra dish soap down your RV's kitchen sink.** There is no amount of Dawn Ultra that is too much, so if you have a tank larger than 40 gallons, consider using more. You might see suds foaming back out of your sink or shower lines, which is a good sign because it means that the grease-eating dish soap is spreading throughout your RV's pipes and cleaning out all the built-up residue.
4. **Let Dawn Ultra sit in the tank and lines overnight.**
5. **Open your gray tank valve in the morning and empty your gray tank.** You'll probably see a grayish-white residue on the bottom of your holding tank discharge pipe, which is literally the grease that was previously clinging to the inside walls of your holding tank.
6. **Rinse your tank very well by filling it completely with fresh water and dumping it several times.**
7. **Repeat these steps if necessary**; sometimes it can take several cleanings before the gray tank is completely spotless inside.

Note

- If you are primarily a hookup camper (and you follow our advice about gray tank valves), we recommend deep cleaning your gray tank biannually, once at the beginning of the season and once at the end.
- If you are a boondocker (dry camper), we recommend you perform a deep clean like this on the last night of every camping trip to avoid grease buildup inside your gray tank.

Modifications for Full Time RVers

If you are a full-time RVer, deep cleaning tanks can be a lot trickier when you're trying to use them at the same time. It's always best to deep clean when not using your tanks, but this isn't always possible. We recommend that full-time campers deep clean their black tank(s) regularly with Unique Tank Cleaner (every 5-10 dumps) and their gray tank(s) with Dawn Ultra dish soap every week. Insert the modification below where appropriate into the steps on page 1.

For Black Tanks:

1. Fill black tank(s) half or three quarters full with water (depending on anticipated usage).
2. Add one bottle of Tank Cleaner per black tank (or less for smaller tanks), and continue regularly using your toilet.
3. Try to let the product work for a full 72 hours before dumping (if possible).

For Gray Tanks: it's the same process, so refer to the steps on page 2!

Note: For more thorough details on full-time RVing care habits, refer to Full Time RVing: The Definitive Guide to Treating Your Tank.

Deep Cleaning an RV Combo Tank

Combo tanks can sometimes be more challenging to clean if you are using it as both a black and gray water tank. Some RVers stick to using it for only gray water or only black water. Here are a few tips about how to clean your combo tank based on how you are using it:

- **Black water tank only** - refer to the steps in the Deep Cleaning an RV Black Tank section on page 1.
- **Gray/galley water tank only** - refer to the steps in the Deep Cleaning an RV Gray Tank section on page 2.
- **Both gray and black water** - start by cleaning it as if it were solely used as a black tank. If you think there may be ample amounts of grease or soap scum still there that were not taken care of by the black tank cleaning steps, use the gray tank cleaning steps as well.

It never hurts to clean a combo tank with both the black tank and gray tank steps to cover all bases.

Common Tank Care Advice

Deep cleaning your wastewater tanks should never be frustrating or labor-heavy, but it is easy to get stressed out when trying to choose the best way to deep clean your tanks because there are so many different opinions on the subject. The RVing community shares a lot of home remedies and commonly used methods to deep clean RV holding tanks, but often that advice does not pan out as well as you might think. If you are considering using some of the deep cleaning advice passed around by other RVers, we encourage you to read our article on Common RV Holding Tank Myths Debunked; the results of many of the techniques and recommended products fall short of the praise they receive.