FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Invasive Mussel Infestation Prevention Program
Mussel Fee Sticker

Background
Invasive mussels (Golden, Quagga and Zebra) have caused excessive damage to lakes and waterways by reducing fish populations, clogging pipes and motors, limiting recreation, eroding ecosystems, and more. In the 18 months since it was first detected in California, the Golden mussel has spread over 400 miles, costing millions to keep water flowing.

1. **Q: Why am I required to pay the Mussel Fee, and purchase the Mussel Fee Sticker in addition to vessel registration?**

   A: In 2025, (Assembly Bill 149) revised existing legislation, Assembly Bill 2443 (2012), which requires the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to collect an additional fee (the "Mussel Fee") on behalf of California State Parks Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW) on all recreational vessels subject to registration in California.

   By purchasing the Mussel Fee Sticker, recreational boaters help fund efforts to prevent invasive mussel spread through grants administered by DBW at reservoirs that allow boating and fishing recreation. The fee also funds efforts conducted by partner agencies working to prevent invasive mussel (including quagga, zebra, and golden mussels) spread.

2. **Q: How much does it cost?**

   A: The Mussel Fee base cost is $21 when first paid during an even-numbered calendar year and $42 when first paid during an odd-numbered calendar year. The mussel fee amount shall be $42 thereafter and shall be valid for two calendar years. NOTE: Per Assembly Bill 149, the fee will be adjusted for inflation in every odd numbered year.

3. **Q: Why is the cost of the Mussel Fee sticker increasing?**

   A: The cost of the Mussel Fee Sticker has not changed in over 12 years. The increase will help programs funded by sticker revenue keep pace with inflation and the rising costs of prevention efforts caused by the rapid spread of the golden mussel.

4. **Q: Why does my 2026 vessel registration notice say the cost of the Mussel Fee Sticker is $16, rather than $21?**

   A: DMV sent out the 2026 vessel registration notices before the Mussel Fee was increased. Starting October 22, 2026, the Mussel Fee Sticker will be $21 when first paid during an even-numbered calendar year and $42 when first paid during an odd-numbered calendar year.

5. **Q: How do I obtain the Mussel Fee Sticker?**

   A: You can purchase the Mussel Fee Sticker from DMV online at dmv.ca.gov/musselfee, scan the QR code to the right, or visit a DMV field office. AAA members can purchase a Mussel Fee Sticker at local branch offices. DMV or AAA will provide two stickers, one for each side of the hull. The stickers will indicate the year through which they are valid. The color of each sticker will be the same as the color of the current vessel registration stickers, which are purchased separately.

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6. **Q: Can I purchase the Mussel Fee Sticker along with my vessel registration renewal?**

   A: Although you can purchase the sticker at the same time as your vessel registration renewal, the sticker is a separate transaction from vessel registration. The mussel fee sticker is required, but it is not a requirement of vessel registration. You may purchase the mussel fee sticker at DMV's website at dmv.ca.gov/musselfee, or at a AAA field office, if you are a member.

7. **Q: How do I obtain the Mussel Fee Sticker if I purchase a new boat?**

   A: Purchase the Mussel Fee Sticker from DMV's website at dmv.ca.gov/musselfee, scan the QR code shown above, or by visiting a DMV or AAA field office, if you are a member.

8. **Who do I contact if my Mussel Fee Sticker is lost, damaged or stolen?**

   A: Contact the DMV to obtain the replacement Mussel Fee Sticker(s) for $42, from their website at dmv.ca.gov/musselfee, scan the QR code shown above, visit a DMV field office or AAA office, if you are a member. The cost of a replacement sticker will be adjusted for inflation in every odd numbered year. For further questions, you can go to the following website to see how to contact the DMV by phone, mail, or in person: Contact Us - California DMV

9. **Q: Who do I contact if I paid the Mussel Fee but did not receive my Mussel Fee Stickers?**

   A: Until you receive your stickers, keep a copy of your receipt or screenshot of your receipt if you purchased it online from DMV, to show to an officer when asked. You can also call the DMV at 1-800-777-0133. If you paid the Mussel Fee but still have not received your Mussel Fee Stickers, you can indicate this on DMV's "Application for replacement Plates, Stickers, and Documents" form (REG 156), noting that the original stickers were not received.

10. **How long is the sticker valid?**

    A: The Mussel Fee Sticker is valid through December 31 of every odd-numbered year (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 5201).

11. **Q: What if I do not pay the Mussel Fee or do not place the Mussel Fee Stickers on my boat?**

    A: Law enforcement officers can cite a freshwater boater operating a vessel without the Mussel Fee Sticker, using California Code of Regulations Title 14, Sec 5212.

12. **Q: What is the marine water exemption? What do I need to do if I am exempt?**

    A: Boats used exclusively in salt water, such as along the California coast and bay areas such as San Francisco, Suisun Bay, Monterey, San Diego or in areas west of Chipps Island in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, are exempt from the Mussel Fee and you do not need to purchase the Mussel Fee Sticker. Fresh water boaters must pay the mussel fee and display the stickers issued by DMV.

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13. Q: I have always used my boat in salt water, but I am thinking of occasionally using it in fresh water such as in inland waterways, rivers, lakes, reservoirs, wetlands, or the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta east of Chipps Island. Do I need the sticker?

A: Yes, you will need to purchase the Mussel Fee Sticker(s) at: dmv.ca.gov/musselfee or scan the QR code shown above, visit a DMV field office, or AAA office if you are a member.

14. Will my Mussel Fee Sticker allow me to boat in any freshwater reservoir or lake without paying for an inspection or cleaning?

A**:** No**.** The Mussel Fee Sticker does not pay for individual boat inspections or for local water agency requirements. Boat inspection programs are implemented by the water managers and may vary at each location. Please contact the waterbody manager directly for information regarding local programs and requirements prior to your visit. For contact information please go to: https://dbw.parks.ca.gov/inspections.

15. Q: I am not a California resident, but I plan to boat in California. Do I need to obtain the state's Mussel Fee Sticker?

A**:** If you are not a California resident, but you're planning on boating in California, you are encouraged to but not required to purchase the Mussel Fee Sticker as long as you are within the state for less than 90 days. After 90 days, your vessel must be registered with DMV and will be subject to the Mussel Fee Sticker requirement. However, we do recommend that you contact the manager of the waterbody that you are planning on visiting ahead of time, for information on local fees, restrictions, and/or inspections. Local jurisdictions may enforce more stringent sticker requirements. For contact information, please go to: https://dbw.parks.ca.gov/inspections

16. Q: Are Coast Guard documented vessels required to pay the Mussel Fee and display a sticker?

A: No. Documented vessels are not required to pay the Mussel Fee or display Mussel Fee Stickers. However, individual water bodies may require boat inspections for the presence of aquatic invasive species. Boaters may also be required to pay inspection fees prior to launch regardless of vessel origin, registration, or documentation
(California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 5211).

17. Q: Where do I place the Mussel Fee Stickers?

A: Place one on each side of the boat next to, and in line with the CF number and vessel registration stickers, so that law enforcement identification may be made.

