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RV Holding Tank Tips

by Dennis Gaub, for KOA Kompass

Hookups at KOA campgrounds that drain wastewater and sewage help bring the comforts of home to the road. But, to keep that homey feeling, recreational vehicle owners should learn proper use and care of holding tanks on their RVs, according to a KOA expert.

Jim Finch, KOA's vice-president/technical services, suggests dumping the holding tanks before hitting the road to lower the weight of a rig and improve fuel economy.

"At the same time, the temptation is to open the holding tanks when you get to a campground and leave them open with the idea that now it's just like home – I can use my shower, toilet and kitchen sink and it all drains away," he says.

That approach works for the so-called gray water (non-sewage) holding tank, Finch says, but it can cause problems with the sewage tank.

That's because RVs use marine-style, low-flush toilets that have much less capacity – one quart or two quarts at the most – than a home toilet.

So, if a rig owner "opens the gate" on the sewage tank, solids will begin to build up a pile at the bottom of the tank because there's not enough liquid to carry the solids away, Finch explains.

"So it's a bad thing for them to do, especially if they happen to take the rig home and park it for three weeks. Now, that glob of sewage has become hard. It's difficult to deal with," he says.

Finch's recommendation?

A rig owner should try to keep the sewage holding tank at least half full – RVs have gauges to check on capacity – to improve the efficiency of the sewage system.

This applies even when an RV is parked at a campground for week. The owner might only flush the tank two or three times during the stay, he says.

By doing that, a rig's sewage tank gets enough volume to begin working like a septic tank in which biological actions cause the solids begin to break down into a sludge.

The last thing you do before leaving the campground is discharge both holding tanks because you do not want to leave sewage in the tank while the rig is parked at home.

Sometimes, RV owners flush both holding tanks at the same time.

Finch advises against that: "You flush your sewage first, and run enough water into the sewage holding tank through the toilet to wash out the tank. When you flush the grey water it will carry everything down and rinse out your sewer hose."

Finch says RV owners who heed his suggestions will want to control odors by using a holding-tank additive. Older additives use formaldehyde, but he advises environmentally



Jim Finch

responsible RV owners to look for non-formaldehyde additives.

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