



ETIQUETTE FOR FISHING NEAR PRIVATE DOCKS AND HOMES

These eight rules of etiquette can help minimize clashes between boating anglers and waterfront residents.

Videos of waterfront residents confronting boating anglers fishing around private docks and shores fill the internet. Ironically, it's often a case of boater versus boater, as many residents have their own boats at the docks.

Fish such as freshwater bass are attracted to the shade and structure offered by boat docks, pilings and seawalls. This in turn attracts boating anglers.

Conflicts usually arise when waterfront residents tell boating anglers that they're trespassing. When anglers disagree and continue to fish, tempers flare and harsh words fly. Some residents call the police or resort to harassment. In the worst cases, anglers and residents both provoke, though violent altercations are rare.

As a boating angler, I've experienced the early stages of these situations myself. Fortunately, none reached the boiling point. And to be fair, not all residents object to boating anglers. The great

majority say nothing. Some even come out to say hi and ask about the fishing. Yet enough tense encounters occur to ask the question: What's the code of conduct when maneuvering your boat to fish around private docks, shorelines and marinas?

First, put yourself in the shoes of a waterfront resident and imagine the disquiet brought on by someone approaching by boat to fish the waters lapping at your backyard. Such homes usually have big windows facing the water to take in the view, but that also lets a boater peer inside. Or maybe the residents are having a backyard family barbecue and don't

appreciate uninvited guests. In either case, it can be intrusive.

Residents also have concerns that an errant cast of a hook-studded lure can snag docks, lifts, lines, boat upholstery, canvas covers and inflatable water toys, causing property damage. Then there are family dogs that streak to the water's edge, bark at anglers and disrupt the peace.

Yet no one owns the water, as dock-centric boating anglers love to say. Indeed. Consequently, any claims that boaters fishing around docks and shorelines are trespassing prove ill-founded.

That said, I believe it's wise to adhere to a certain code of conduct when fishing around private docks and shore property. Here are my eight rules of etiquette.

1. OBEY ORDINANCES. Make sure you know and obey all local laws related to fishing around docks. Generally speaking, there are not many restrictions, but some local ordinances might prohibit fishing within certain marinas.

2. RESPECT PRIVACY. When waterfront residents are enjoying time outside—lounging in the sun, docking their boat, enjoying a backyard barbecue, etc.—move on.

3. DON'T TRESPASS. Avoid stepping on or touching private property, be it on a dock or terra

firma. The moment you transition from your boat to someone's real property—or even bump your boat into a dock—it could be considered trespassing.

4. EXPERT CASTING ONLY. I don't fish around private docks and shorelines with novice anglers. Such fishing requires precise casts to avoid snags and catch fish. It's experts-only in the dock-fishing game.

5. AVOID SWIMMERS. Don't fish if you find people swimming around a dock or shoreline. Not only is it rude, but you stand the risk injuring someone with a flying lure or a sharp hook.

6. STEER CLEAR OF INFLATABLES. Increasingly, waterfront residents anchor inflatable mats, slides and bounce houses in the waters off their backyards. Some are very expensive and can be punctured by a fishing hook. Don't take the chance. When you spy one of these, move on.

7. DON'T ARGUE. If a waterfront resident asks you not to fish around their dock or shoreline, politely comply. There are plenty of other docks and shorelines to fish, and arguing can only ruin an otherwise pleasant day on the water.

8. PAY FOR YOUR MISTAKES. If one of your casts does snag a canvas cover, boat upholstery or inflatable, offer to pay for your mistake. The best way is to visit the home from the street side after you're done fishing. If no one is home, leave a note with your contact information and an offer of compensation.