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New Sea Tow Survey Finds Higher Costs Aren't Keeping Boaters Off the Water

While Some Recreational Boaters Are Taking Shorter Trips or Heading Out Less Often, More Than Half Report Boating About The Same or More Than Last Year

SOUTHOLD, N.Y. – Aug. 28, 2026 – Sea Tow Services International (Sea Tow®), recognized throughout the marine industry as Your Road Service at Sea®, released its findings from its 2026 member survey.

The purpose of the survey was to better understand how rising fuel prices and other costs are affecting recreational boating. The survey, which generated over 5,500 responses, comes as boaters are faced with higher fuel prices at both roadside pumps and marina fuel docks. Sea Tow collected real-time data in an effort to provide an accurate snapshot of members' habits to ensure its best possible services are available to deploy.

While boaters are feeling the impact of rising costs, Sea Tow's survey results reflect that boaters remain committed to spending time on the water. More than half of participants (52%) report boating the same or more than last year, while others are modifying by boating less, taking shorter trips, or staying closer to home.

Among the survey's key findings:

- **Fuel is driving the greatest cost pressure.** 84% of interviewees cited fuel as the boating expense that has increased the most, followed by maintenance (36%), marina and slip fees (22%), and insurance (18%).
- **Many boaters are not changing how they use their boats.** Despite higher costs, 46% said they are using their boats the same way they always have, while 32% are boating less, and 17% are staying closer to home.
- **Boaters making changes are finding ways to reduce costs without forgoing boating.** Respondents who adjusted their boating habits due to rising fuel costs have made one or more changes to their boating habits: 53% are boating less often, 42% are taking shorter trips, 38% are staying closer to home, and 29% are running at lower speeds.
- **Fuel remains a significant expense for a typical day on the water.** More than half of survey participants (52%) reported spending \$50 to \$100 on fuel per trip, while 30% spent \$100 to \$250, and 18% spent more than \$250.
- **More than half are boating at least as often as last year.** While 48% said they are boating somewhat or much less often than last year, 52% reported boating about the same or more often.
- **Boaters are already thinking about next season.** Looking ahead to the 2027 boating season, 37% cited fuel prices as their biggest concern, while 30% expect their boating habits to remain about the same. 14% said finding time to boat is a concern, and 10% cited maintenance costs as a concern.

"At Sea Tow, we value our members' feedback. The insights from our 2026 survey help us better understand their boating habits, making Captains even more prepared to deliver a high-level of customer service," said

Sea Tow President Kristen Frohnhoefer. “The survey shows that boaters continue to prioritize time on the water. While some are adjusting to higher fuel and other boating costs, they are finding ways to adapt rather than give up time on the water. Higher costs are having an impact, but they aren’t necessarily keeping boaters at the dock.”

Sea Tow’s service activity underscores the survey findings. Service volume remains consistent with the previous boating season, within 3% of the number of service requests in 2025. The types of assistance boaters request also remain consistent with prior years, led by towing (53%), ungroundings (13%), fuel delivery (7%), and jump-starts (6.5%).

As boaters look for ways to manage rising costs, a Sea Tow membership provides predictable annual access to on-water assistance without out-of-pocket expenses. With a Sea Tow membership, boaters pay one annual rate of \$249/year for Gold Card membership and \$169/year for a Lake Card membership. Benefits include unlimited boat towing in the member’s home area with no distance or dollar limits, jump starts, fuel delivery, scheduled dock-to-dock tows, and more.

Earlier this year, Sea Tow released a fully redesigned mobile application. The Sea Tow App offers a faster and more accurate way to request assistance, as well as intuitive navigation, real-time wind, tides, and weather. Download today on iOS via the Apple Store and on Android via Google Play.

For more information about Sea Tow, visit seatow.com.

About Sea Tow Services International, Inc.

Sea Tow Services International Inc. is the administrator of the worldwide Sea Tow® membership program and network of Sea Tow franchisees who provide assistance to members. Sea Tow has been the premier leader of on-water assistance for 40+ years. The pioneering concept, founded by Captain Joseph Frohnhoefer, was established in Southold, NY when the United States Coast Guard ceased response to non-emergency assistance calls. Sea Tow members are provided with a 24/7 connection to Coast Guard-Licensed Captains to assist with their on-water needs. In addition, the franchise network handles salvage and recovery operations, and responds to natural disasters, environmental hazards and oil spill cleanups. Sea Tow’s fully redesigned mobile application delivers a more seamless, responsive experience for members and non-members alike. The upgraded platform offers improved functionality, intuitive navigation, real-time wind, tide, and weather data, and faster access to Sea Tow’s trusted on-water assistance services. Sea Care is Sea Tow’s B2B offering that provides participants the option to include on-water assistance membership with the purchase of a boat, trailer, or engine.

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