

# Welcome to Floating Home Life!



Dear New Neighbor,

Welcome to your floating home! On behalf of the Floating Home Association (FHA) and your community of fellow floating home residents, we are delighted to have you here. Living on the water is a truly special experience—one that uniquely combines the beauty of nature with the exciting energy of city life.

From the fish swimming beneath your home to the birds soaring overhead, you're immersed in a serene, one-of-a-kind ecosystem. At the same time, the city of Seattle—with its world-class restaurants, art, and culture—is just a stone's throw away. Whether you're taking a quiet paddle at sunset or strolling through one of our neighborhood farmers' markets, every day brings something unique to enjoy.

As you settle in, know that you're part of a warm and welcoming community. The Floating Home Association is here to help you navigate the joys and quirks of floating home living. Our website [seattlefloatinghomes.org](https://seattlefloatinghomes.org) is full of helpful resources, from safety tips to information about how you can get involved in this wonderful community. We encourage you to connect with your neighbors and to personally join the FHA to help preserve and celebrate this remarkable lifestyle.

To help you get started, we've included a packet of helpful information and some goodies from local merchants in a reusable FHA Welcome Bag! Since floating homes are limited on space, we've tried to make all contents either tasty or practical. If you ever have questions or need advice, don't hesitate to email us at **contact@seattlefloatinghomes.org**. We're so glad you're here and we look forward to seeing you on the water!

Stafford Green, FHA President

Stephanie Farrell, Welcoming Committee

# Floating Home History

Historically, Seattle's floating home community has boasted a quirky mixture of artists, bohemians, rebels and free thinkers. Though the early 1900s saw the occasional floating summer home or fishing cabin, houseboats became a community when floating structures were built to house workers from nearby logging camps. By the 1930s blue- and pink-collar workers had become the backbone of the community as Wobblies (Industrial Workers of the World union members) discovered cheap, easy-access living while working in the lumber mills along Denny and the Duwamish.

The boom time for Seattle's floating homes community was the Great Depression and the war years, witnessing the erection of over 2,000 floating structures on Lake Union and Portage Bay. These homes provided cheap living somewhat far afield from the eye of the taxman and prohibition enforcement. Stories of bootleggers, brothels and hooligans add lore to every dock, whether true or just the stuff of late-night tall-tale-telling.



*Houseboats, likely north of Madison Street, Lake Washington, 1912*

*Photo Credit: James Patrick Lee, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.*

The 1950s saw a concerted effort by the city to rid Seattle of houseboats, declaring the lifestyle a public health hazard. Government building projects forced the eviction of over half the community. Facing the imminent demise of their lifestyle, in 1962 houseboaters banded together in the newly created Floating Homes Association, whose goal was "to protect Seattle's old and colorful houseboat colony." Thus began the all-out effort to clean up the neighborhood, the major change coming from a ground-breaking innovation which allowed the hookup of all floating homes to the public sewage system. **The Floating Homes Association galvanized the community and created what it is today: a very close, tight-knit haven within Seattle.**

The 1970's and '80s saw the rise of the young urban professional, which brought a new demographic to the community that recognized floating homes as not only unique inner-city living, but as a lifestyle choice. Floating homes are generally smaller, simpler and more community-oriented, with easy access to the water and a place for an instant vacation upon return home from work. Many a scalawag's shack was leveled and transformed into an award-winning home. Living in close proximity, many residents are involved with their dock mates' lives. Whether for an evening of sailing, doing laundry or watching TV, many people see their dock mates as extended family.

The community is as changing as the skyline, but will forever be inspired by a certain disdain for the ordinary, a love of nature, and pride in the bohemian spirit which is the heart of the community.

Want to learn more? Visit **[seattlefloatinghomes.org](http://seattlefloatinghomes.org)**

Or purchase **[Seattle's Floating Homes](#)** Hardcover – July 2, 2012 by Erin Feeney.

# The Good Neighbor Manifesto

1. **Get to know your neighbors!** Building relationships creates a stronger community. Introduce yourself, have conversations, and be friendly--don't wait for issues to arise.
2. **Know your Dock Rules** If you didn't receive a written list, ask a member of your dock board for one.
3. **Help When You Can** Helping each other makes daily life easier and brings us closer together.
4. **Keep Noise & Lights in Check** You've probably noticed that our homes are very close and water amplifies sound, so being respectful with noise is essential to happy living. Please respect quiet hours for music and outdoor conversations, especially in the early morning and after 10 p.m. Reserve screaming for emergencies and if you need to alert the dock in a crisis, an air horn works better. Remind your visitors to follow these same courtesies. Bright porch lights or string lights can also disturb neighbors--use downlights or low wattage.
5. **Human Visitors** The great thing about the floating home community is that folks watch out for each other, so they often question visitors they don't recognize to minimize unwanted crime. It is helpful to let your dock mates know if you're expecting visitors or hosting a party, and give guests a heads up that they might get asked, "Are you visiting someone on the dock?" Have fun in communal areas, but leave them as you found them.
6. **Wildlife Visitors** We share the lake with more than just people! Ducks, birds, beavers, otters, raccoons, rats, fish,... it's their home too. Never feed the wildlife—it's for both their safety and ours. Avoid leaving trash or any food outdoors or unattended. It will almost immediately attract aggressive raccoons or others. Note: Hummingbirds can be fed, but only with boiled and filtered sugar water (4:1 water to sugar). It must be cleaned and changed weekly, and you should continue feeding them throughout the winter or the little guys may starve.
7. **"Petiquette"** Please keep dogs leashed in common areas, clean up their waste immediately, and avoid prolonged barking (by you or your dog :-). Pet potty patches can get really smelly and only work if you buy the weekly service. Consider skipping them and taking your pooch for a nice walk instead!
8. **Garbage/Recycling** Please dispose of garbage, compostables, and recyclables (flatten boxes) in the appropriate onshore bins. Items like paint, solvents, batteries, and oil must go to a King County Household Hazardous Waste Station--never put these in the dumpsters. Most importantly, never dispose of anything from your dock or home into the Lake as it harms all of us and the beautiful lake (and it's illegal). Environmental stewardship starts at home!
9. **Secure Your Stuff** Make sure household items near the water are secured so they don't blow or fall into the lake. Umbrellas like to take flight in a storm. More on this in the Safety tips...
10. **Sharing is Caring** Since storage space is limited, sharing tools and other large items is a great way to increase inventory/ resources without increasing your footprint.
11. **Enjoy!** 4th of July fireworks, Duck Dodge races, paddle boards, birdwatching, kayaking to dinner, crew races, sunbathing, Dragon Boat Caroling and Reverse Trick-or-Treating, polar bear plunges, hot tub boats, dock parties, heron fly-bys, eagle sightings, beaver visits, goose hatchings, Christmas ships, stormy nights, sun rises, sunsets....it's a pretty great way of life!



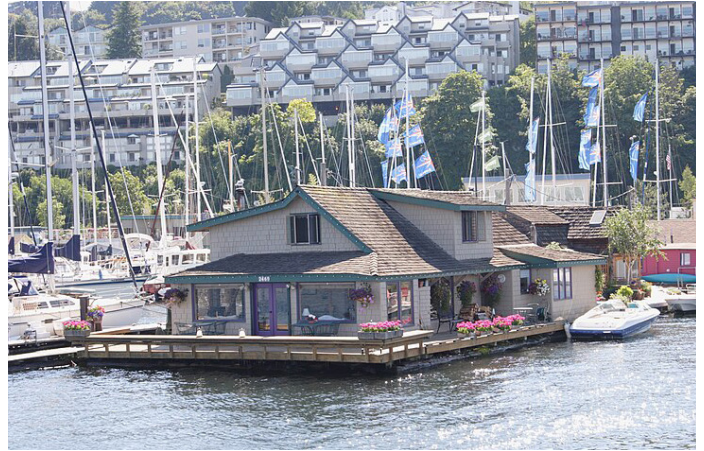
Floating homes on Portage Bay, February 2024. Photo Credit: Joe Mabel.



# Safety & Maintenance Tips

- 1. Keep the Dock Clear** A clutter-free dock is safer and lessens the probability that critters will nest there.
- 2. Secure Your Stuff** This one is so important that it's on both lists! Secure personal items like kayaks, SUPs, and boats to prevent them from drifting into the water or blocking the channel. Late fall and winter winds can turn umbrellas, chairs, and cushions into dangerous projectiles. Tie them down or store them safely. Storing umbrellas and cushions helps prevent mold and weather damage. For bikes, invest in a strong U-lock and lock frame to an immovable object as they're a thief favorite.
- 3. Hire Good Contractors** You are responsible for their actions. Educate them on the unique needs of floating homes and to ensure they know and follow water safety practices. Even better, consult your dock mates or Resources on FHA website for recommended contractors with experience working on floating homes (as they are much different than land houses!). Lastly, consult your own dock rules as they change from dock to dock.
- 4. Avoid Sewer Woes** Inspect sewer lines annually. Don't flush anything other than toilet paper and waste, and never put grease down the kitchen sink. Sewer backups are never fun, so abide by these flush rules:

✓ Only Toilet paper	X Tissue
X Wipes	X Paper towels
X Unwanted medications	X Hygiene products
X Ear swabs	X Dental floss
X Kitty Litter	X Coffee Grounds
- 5. Prevent Freezing Pipes** When freezing temps are predicted, turn on all faucets to a slow stream to prevent pipe breaks. Installing heating tape on outdoor pipes can also be very effective.
- 6. Painting and Staining** Use tarps to catch paint chips or dust. Keep small amounts of paint in drip pans and clean up spills immediately so they don't go into the lake.
- 7. Gardening** Use tarps while potting to prevent soil and debris from falling into the water. Avoid over watering plants treated with fertilizers, as runoff can harm the lake ecosystem. If you notice thirsty plants in communal spaces, be a cool neighbor and water them. Keeping shared spaces tidy like sweeping leaves off of stairs is also a cool thing to do.
- 8. SNOW** When the snow comes, floating home owners band together and react quickly as snow loads can 'turtle' floating homes. After a snow, clear roofs and docks quickly yourself or find/hire someone else for the job. A snow shovel is definitely worth making room for!
- 9. 101 Uses for a Dining Tray...** To prevent your last screw or screw driver from joining many others at the bottom of the lake, designate a dining tray for outdoor projects and you won't regret it!
- 10. Boating and Repairs** For engine work, use absorbent pads for oil changes and recycle waste oil, batteries, and filters appropriately. For painting and varnishing, use tarps to catch dust and debris and clean up spills. The Center for Wooden Boats at the south end of Lake Union is a great resource! They have classes on environmentally safe practices.
- 11. Float Planes** When the lights flash on the buoys, be on the lookout for the sea planes. We all share the lake.
- 12. Fire is the biggest risk to floating homes, so precautions are paramount.** We saved this most important item for last. No open flames--candles may smell lovely, but they're not safe on floating homes. Opt for flameless alternatives. Gas or electric cookers are safer than open flames. Always stay with your cooking device and keep a fire extinguisher nearby. Most docks have a yearly fire safety meeting to review hose and fire extinguisher locations and operation--attend these and know how to react in an emergency. It could save your life and that of your neighbors.



*Sleepless in Seattle" houseboat, 2009. Photo Credit: Brian Teutsch.*

# LAKE UNION Safety Tips

Whether you're on a boat, kayak, or paddleboard, we want you to be safe while you enjoy the lake.

## **Wear a life jacket that fits properly**

A life jacket should be tight enough that you cannot pull it above your ears. A loose life jacket can cause strangulation or keep you from floating with your head above the water if you were to fall unconscious.

## **Dress for the weather**

Check the weather forecast and dress accordingly. It always feels cooler on the water.

## **Use sun protection**

Using sunscreen is a must, especially during spring, summer, and fall. Sunglasses and a hat are highly recommended.

## **Stay close to shore**

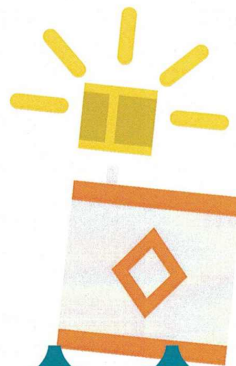
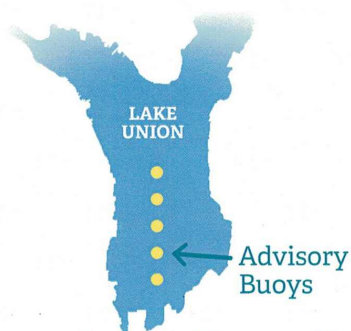
While kayaking or paddleboarding, stay close to shore to avoid conflicts with boats and seaplanes. Watch for boats leaving marinas.

## **Make eye contact**

Make eye contact with boat skippers and seaplane pilots and give a friendly wave. Always be prepared to change course and/or speed to avoid a collision.

## **Watch for seaplanes**

Between Memorial Day and Labor Day (approx.), white advisory buoys mark an approximate seaplane takeoff and landing area. When yellow lights are flashing, we recommend you stay 200 ft. east or west of the buoys.



In times of distress,  
contact the SPD Harbor  
Patrol by calling **9-1-1**



Seattle  
Police Department

# Resources

Visit the FHA website at [seattlefloatinghomes.org](https://seattlefloatinghomes.org) for a load of helpful links and resources including:

Floating Homes Tour:

<https://seattlefloatinghomes.org/tour/>

Important Emergency & Municipal Contacts :

<https://seattlefloatinghomes.org/resources/important-contacts/>

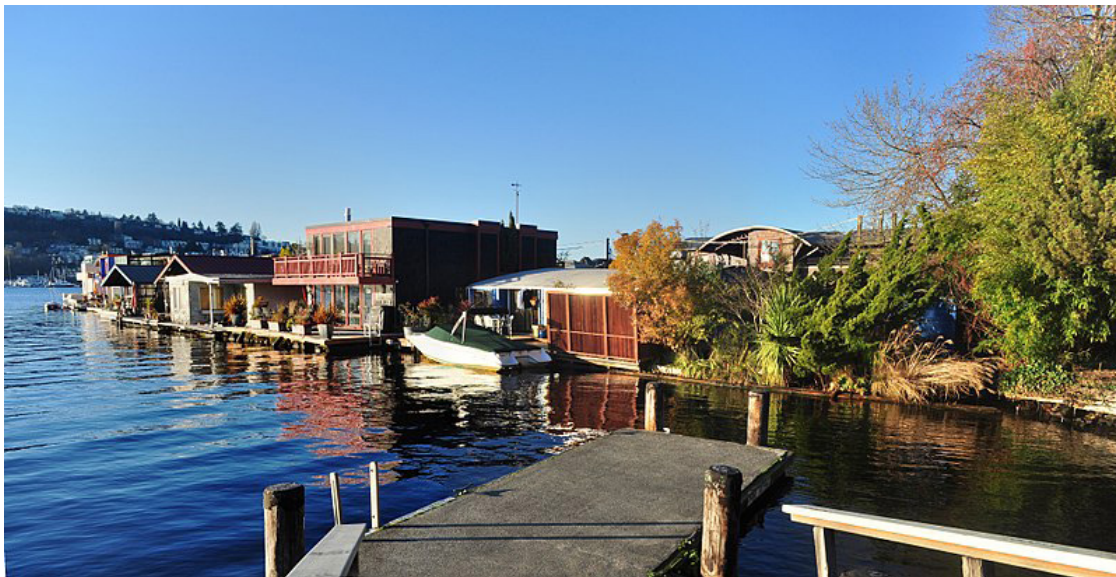
Events Calendar: Coming soon!



*Westlake houseboat colony, Lake Union, 1966.*

*Photo Credit: Bob Miller, Courtesy MOHAI (1096.5.9756).*





*View of Eastlake floating homes from Terry Pettus Park, December, 2017. Photo Credit: Joe Mabel.*

Thanks for reading!  
Email us with any questions or comments at  
**[contact@seattlefloatinghomes.org](mailto:contact@seattlefloatinghomes.org)**.



*Houseboats on Lake Union, circa 1970. Photo Credit: Seattle Municipal Archives.*