

Post-Season Lay-Up: Winterizing Saves Trouble

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The more you prepare for winter the less you repair for summer. Following are some thoughts on storing boats either in or out of the water in a cold, wet climate.

First, consider the engines. Change the oil, of course (acids in used oil are corrosive) and don't forget the reduction gear. Test and/or change the coolant, ensuring that the concentration is appropriate for the coldest temperatures your engine could experience during the winter. Be sure to add antifreeze well before lay-up; it can take as much as a week of running time for the antifreeze and water to mix completely. Or, you can drain the coolant and leave the system empty for the winter.

Replace cooling system zincs now if you have the antifreeze out. If you have a heat exchanger, drain all the raw water and flush with antifreeze, and check the cooler core for choking deposits. Take the seawater impeller out so that it doesn't freeze and crack.

Gas engines should be fogged (with the engine running), and then remaining gas should be drained from the carburetor. Coat the entire engine with an anti-corrosive spray. Drain the water separator fuel filters so they don't freeze and crack. If you have a dry exhaust, firmly affix a cover over the exhaust stack. Many an engine has been destroyed by rain or snow melt entering the cylinders via the stack. Use a cover that fits so snugly that the worst storm of the year won't dislodge it or blow water up under it. Stack covers also discourage swallows from nesting inside in the spring. Wet exhaust outlets should also be taped shut.

If your boat winters in the water, tighten your stuffing box so the pumps won't be running all winter. Speaking of pumps, have you checked all the electrical connections and hose clamps, and ensured that no debris in the bilge will either clog the intakes or jam the float switches?

Drain all the water from wash-downs and from the house water system, including water heater. Non-toxic RV antifreeze prevents freezing down to 50 below, so it can protect your house water lines; just be sure to bypass the water heater so you don't need too many gallons. Or use an air compressor to blow all the water out of your lines, but don't forget any outlets, like showers. Leave faucets and valves open.

Clean the interior and remove food. Don't leave anything inside that can freeze and burst, or that may attract rodents. Clean the refrigerator and leave the door open with a box of baking soda inside to prevent odors. Remove cushions, mattresses, and other items that can collect moisture. Trace the origin of any water leaks (usually windows or vents) and seal them. Aluminum window frames can corrode badly over the winter, so this is a good time to wax them. Likewise, external stainless steel fittings like louvered vent covers and door handles benefit from a coat of marine metal wax.

Cold doesn't hurt electronics but condensation does. Besides, electronic equipment is a temptation to thieves. Store yours at home and you won't have to worry.

Give the boat's exterior a thorough cleaning, repair damage so that water doesn't work in through the damaged areas, causing more problems, and renew the paint, varnish, or gel coat. A good coat of wax will go a long way toward maintaining the boat's appearance once it is clean.

Be sure your lines are clean and dry before stowing them. There is no point in leaving them out where sunlight will destroy them in a few years. In fact, putting a cover over the anchor winch would probably extend the life of your rode if it is nylon.

Some owners rig plastic tarps to shed snow, while others just plan to shovel fre-

quently. In areas of dry snow the only problem may be that it blows in through door-sills and vents. Tape shut your vents to prevent snow from filling the boat, although it's best to use a permeable fabric to allow passage of air.

Many people like to keep heat in their boats through the winter, but you need to consider the cost, the potential for damaging stray currents if any faults should develop in the power cord, and the remote possibility of fire. You have to assess your own situation. It is vital that your batteries don't freeze, but that can be prevented by keeping them charged, and a solar panel can do that. Some people like to keep an infrared bulb burning all winter to fight mildew. If a boat is properly winterized there is probably no real advantage to keeping heat on, but probably no great disadvantage either, other than the cost of the energy.

Finally, before you button her up for the season, take a close look at your survival equipment. Be sure survival suits are clean and dry, and stored either open or loosely rolled with no sharp creases. Now is the time to send them in for repair if necessary. How about the expiration date on your EPIRB and PFD light batteries? And what about the mandatory repack on your life raft. It's probably cheaper to send it in now than to wait until the spring rush. ♦