



U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, Division 20

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United States Coast Guard Auxiliary



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Winterizing: Now or Later, It Has To Be Done

While it has been kind of cold and dreary for the past 2 weeks, I know as soon as I write a column on de-commissioning the boat for the winter season that an Indian summer will arrive to bathe us in the last warmth of the year. This will be but a reminder that many months of kindly weather are behind us and many months of dark, cold and dreary weather are ahead of us. So, here we go, Indian summer or not! Even if you hand off your boat to your dock master and say, “see you in the Spring”, there are some tips in here that you will want to be aware of. This column is about that.

On the Hard or In the Water

Clearly, there are some basic steps to de-commissioning and one of them is to get the boat safely ‘onto the hard’, as the old-timers call dry-dock. Storing your winterized boat in the water can only be done in a very controlled environment with, generally, professional and near-constant attention. Even with signs of global-heating all around us, (I think global warming sounds too benign), the creeks and coves of Out East freeze up for much of the winter. Even Moriches Bay itself has frozen across over the years and I am talking about recent years. The only upside to storing your winterized boat in the water is that you don’t have to pay to haul the boat and return it to the water in the spring. I still believe that that can be penny-wise and pound-foolish if this watery winter berth isn’t a very controlled environment. Recall that 80% of boat’s that do sink do so at the dock (see SSP, The Dangerous Dock! 12/06/06). So, let’s focus this column on spending the winter on the hard!

Making a List and Checking It Twice

If you are going to hand the boat over to the dock master and say, 'see you in the spring', do so with a written check list, especially if you intend to do some of the work yourself. As you'll see, the advice below is not 100% extensive. I'd need most of the newspaper to give you a check list that could be used by every boat. (BTW, if you want a copy of the Boat-US/Seaworthy article on winterization, email me below and I will email a copy to you.) So, work with your dock master in signing off on what will be done by the yard and, if you desire to be involved, by you. Some ideas/categories:

Change the oil and oil filters

Change the lubricant in engine transmission or the outboard lower unit

Apply fogging if called for by manufacturer

Fill the boat's fuel tanks completely full

Add biocide and/or stabilizing agents to fuel

Change the fuel filters

Add antifreeze to the engine cooling system

Add distilled water to batteries, charge completely and disconnect

Charge batteries to capacity

Before thinking about covering the boat with shrink-wrap or canvas, inspect the hull. Any blisters in the gelcoat? If so, that has to be addressed sooner rather than later as that will lead to water infiltrating the hull, making the boat less sea-worthy. Stress cracks, which often develop at the bow, need professional attention. Just putting a patch over it and sanding, a la the gelcoat blister, won't fix that one. It's structural. As to washing and waxing the hull, I opt for cleaning now and waxing in the spring.

Does the boat have a cabin of any kind? Get the "moisture-soaker-uppers", i.e., desiccants, in there. Inexpensive and they inhibit the build-up of moisture that leads to mold. And don't forget the hatches, closets and lazarettes.

Other than covering the boat, the "mechanical system" is the most obvious place to start. Your mechanical system may only be your gasoline-powered 90-HP Johnson outboard. If so, you are going to flush the engine with fresh water (attached a garden hose to the intake and let it flush engine OFF!), 'fog' the engine with lubricating oil (be sure the fuel system is disconnected from the engine when you start the process), clean/replace the spark plugs and fuel filter, lube the carburetor and anything else that moves, choke, cam, starter linkage etc. Don't forget the lower unit (what the prop comes out of). Replace the lube oil. BTW, if you open the drain plug and water comes out first (oil floats), you need to replace the seal. Inspect the prop(s). Any dings? Get a professional to look at that. A bad 'wheel' can shake your engine apart.

So that's your outboard. Did I ask if you had a diesel engine or an I/O? Does the boat have a transmission; In-board water system (sink/shower); Air-conditioner; Electronics going to stay aboard or come home with the owner? So, as you can see, the list is far more extensive than the short list above.

But have fun! She's your boat!
