



Winter Wisdom: Helpful Preparation Tips for Winter Lay-up Afloat

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Do you keep your boat where the winters aren't too fierce, but still cold enough to put an end to the boating season? If your boat is in the water all year, don't ignore it all winter! ACE Marine Advisory Services is pleased to offer important tips to help you prepare your boat for the winter season, and help prevent potential weather-related problems.

- Make regular inspection visits to your vessel to ensure the bilges are dry, drains are clear, mooring lines are secure and not chafing, and batteries are charged. Post emergency phone numbers in one of the boat's windows facing the dock. If you'll be away for an extended period, arrange to have a friend or neighbor check on the boat.
- Accumulating leaves, ice or snow can block cockpit drains, and the weight of snow or rainwater collecting in the cockpit can force the stern down, allowing water to enter through openings normally above the waterline. Inspect all through-hulls close to the waterline. If any of them are plastic, they can develop cracks that will allow water in if they become submerged. They should be replaced with bronze or fiber-reinforced nylon.
- Make certain bilge pumps and float switches are in good condition, and keep the batteries charged. Remember, though, that pumps don't sink boats. Leaks sink boats. Inspect all your hoses, valves, outdrive bellows, stuffing boxes, strainers and through-hulls and be sure everything is ship-shape. Be sure all hatches are secured, and all cockpit hatch drains are clear of debris and obstructions.
- Close all the seacocks. If they are left open, and a short period of freezing weather causes a hose to split or a strainer to crack, the boat will sink when the weather warms up. In fresh water where muskrats may be a problem, cover or block exhaust through-hulls. Be sure to inspect all the plumbing when opening the seacocks in the spring.
- Install a smoke detector and a high water alarm. If there's a problem onboard, the alarm may be heard by a neighbor or a marina employee.
- Marinas are a target for thieves in the winter. Be sure to remove all valuables from your boat, including electronics, tools, binoculars, fishing gear and small outboard motors, and take them home or store them safely ashore.
- Remove sails, including roller-furled headsails, to prevent them from being damaged during a winter storm. Also, be sure all exterior canvas is well secured.
- If you must use heaters on board, consider using non-thermostatic "hot sticks" or "air dryers," which are safer, use less electricity, and help fight mildew by keeping air moving. Leave interior lockers open to provide more air circulation.

Spend some time preparing for colder weather, and make regular visits to your boat. A bit of prevention in the fall, and attention throughout the winter, may prevent many headaches later!

