

Good night baby. Sleep tight.

I know season has only just begun but I thought that I might plant a seed regarding long-term storage of your boat. If you have just arrived and are now taking the wraps off you may be experiencing some of the typical woes of seasonal use, or non-use as it may be.

I have a snowbird client from Chicago who is fond of saying that he finds the best way to winterize his boat is to take it Florida.

Doing claims work for the insurance companies I could always count on a large number of files every fall and winter regarding boats that had suffered flooding while stored upon a lift or on davits. Most of the water damage claims generally shared the same cause and origin of failed batteries and / or bilge pumps combined with clogged drains or bilge plugs left installed. Owners would arrive from points north to discover their boats cabin full of water, bilges full of water and inboard or stern drive engines either flooded or damaged.

And so the great debate rages; should you leave the bilge plug in or out when storing a boat upon a lift or a trailer? In my opinion the answer is always leave it out. Anything can happen in the long months when you are away and the only way to make sure you boat will be ready to go when you arrive back on Marco is to have someone run it every couple of weeks and keep up on the maintenance and repairs. But if your situation doesn't allow for absentee management I offer a few tips on long term storage for lift kept watercraft in warm climates. Freezing climates have their own rules that frankly, I'm sure glad we don't have to deal with.

Don't trust your batteries or bilge pumps or battery chargers or shore power connections to keep your bilges dry. The odds of any of these systems failing far out weigh the odds of a drain failing. All the batteries and bilge pumps made wont keep your boat dry once the scuppers and deck drains plug with debris. Particularly leaves. A little forethought is all that is needed. Make sure you bilges and deck drains and scuppers are all clear of debris. Don't store your boat under a tree for any reason. Cut it down if you have to but don't park your boat under it. Pull the batteries and store them in a cool, ventilated place.

I would also suggest pulling off all the cushions you can remove and storing those ashore.

Now think of all the systems aboard your boat that use seawater. You may have bait pumps and deck wash pumps, toilets and even air conditioning. All of these systems need to be flushed of the seawater with fresh. It can be a real bloody knuckle job. If the systems have strainers the job is fairly simple; just open the strainer and put in a garden hose then run the appliance. However many small boats are not equipped with strainers for all the plumbed systems. One thing you can do is to wrestle the hoses off the sea valve fittings, apply water pressure or supply and run the appliance. Trust me blood will flow during this operation. By far the best option is to have a local service company do it for you.

The engines should be fogged and flushed according the manufacturers recommendations. And I would suggest changing the oils for storage so the engines and drives aren't sitting with acid heavy carbon logged dirty oil on the rotating parts all summer.

Now for the head. Marine toilets are finicky beasts at best. Chances are pretty good that the arrangement of the water closet played a significant role in deciding upon which boat to buy. So I offer a few tips on keeping this very important system working as designed. After all if the Admiral isn't happy, nobody is happy. Follow these steps in order. Empty the holding tank at a marina. After it is empty use a hose down the deck fitting to add a few gallons of water to rinse the tank and pump that down. Now flush the toilet water intake plumbing with fresh water from the seawater source while adding holding tank sanitizer. The final step is to flush some vegetable oil down the toilette. Just a little. The oil helps keep all the little O-rings and duck bill valves from getting crusty and hard.

Every boat is little different. I find that a checklist helps very much.

If you don't yet have a boat now is the time to buy. Don't be afraid to make an offer on the boat of your dreams and I will see you on the water.