

10 WINTERIZING DISASTERS

Don't Do This!

By

Whether you do your fishing from a 16-foot skiff or a 60-foot battlewagon, it's likely that as winter draws near you're thinking about winterizing your boat. The best way to winterize a boat is, of course, to use it. Long unattended stretches and sitting idle for months on end is horrible for everything from outboards to electronics. But we do have to face the reality that prior to plummeting temperatures, some level of winterizing is a must to prevent severe damage. Just make sure you do it properly, because your efforts could do more harm than good if you stumble into one of these 10 winterizing disasters.

1. The Botched Bagging

People sometimes get the smart idea to slide a plastic garbage bag overtop their outboard, to keep the rain and snow off. Except this idea isn't smart in the least. While the plastic may keep water off the outside of the engine, condensation will form and become trapped under the plastic—thus moisturizing the powerhead for the entire winter. Bonus Disaster: The same goes when it comes to wrapping the prop and lower unit. In fact, this can be even worse if enough moisture collects to cause freeze-damage in the lower unit

2. All Plugged Up

Launching a boat without putting in the drain plug may be embarrassing, but winterizing a boat without removing those plugs can be catastrophic. If your cover leaks (you did put a cover on the boat... right?) and the bilge fills up with water and then freezes, it can destroy everything from bilge pumps to bulkheads.

3. MSD Misery

If you have a portable MSD onboard, make 1000-percent sure you remove it from the boat entirely. If you have a fixed head, be 1000-percent sure to pump the tank clean. Otherwise, the disaster you'll face goes well beyond the norm. Instead of merely dealing



Using your boat truly is the best way to keep it in good shape through the winter. These anglers are getting ready to fish a warm-water discharge, in January.

with the damage after a fitting or a hose freezes and bursts, there will be a clean-up duty you'll remember for years to come.

4. Terror of the Tarps

Those blue tarps may be cheap, but they can also do severe damage to a boat's gel coat, teak and brightwork,

and the paint job on an outboard. That checkerboard-pattern of filaments you can feel on those tarps is ever-so-slightly abrasive, and if a tarp isn't secured well enough it may shift back and forth in the breeze for days on end. If you haven't covered the part of the boat being subjected to this abuse with an added layer of protection (such as wrapping the outboard cowl or a teak rail with a towel or an old bedsheet), eventually, that tarp can wear away the very finish you were trying to preserve

5. Bow Down Bummer

When a boat is spending the winter on a trailer, no matter how level the parking spot may or may not be, make sure the bow is elevated. Otherwise the boat won't drain properly. Water gets in, it can't get out, and... well, you know the rest of this story.

6. Strap and Buckle Debacle

If you're using straps to help support a winter cover, check to make sure they don't touch any of your boat's vinyl-covered seats—and be especially sure no metal buckles are touching. These straps will be under tension, and if it snows on the





■ Winter can be a little... er... hard on a boat, so make sure you avoid these winterizing disasters.

cover, that tension increases. The areas where a strap compresses the seat's vinyl and the foam beneath it can leave an imprint behind, causing permanent damage.

7. Brain Drain

Outboard engines are designed to drain completely when tilted to the down position. Leaving an outboard tilted up through the winter months is asking for trouble, not only because you can't be sure the cooling system has completely drained, but also because rainwater can fill parts of the lower unit. As we mentioned earlier, wrapping a plastic bag around it to keep the water out will create a disaster of its own—so make darn sure that engine is tilted all the way down.

8. Water, Water, Everywhere

Having a cover that allows water to pool can be worse than having no cover at all. The reason? Water weighs a ton. If the cover rests on a windshield frame, a few hundred pooling pounds can crush it. Same goes for grab rails on a console, mounts on a T-top, and in extreme cases, even the T-top itself.

9. Fire Starter

Once upon a time it was considered acceptable to leave a bare light bulb hanging from an extension cord in the bilge, to add some warmth and prevent freeze damage on boats left in the water. Well, those days are over—thanks to this trick, enough boats have burned to the waterline that some insurance companies explicitly prohibit this practice on boats they cover. Instead, get a dedicated bilge heater.

10. Venting Event

Tightly covering a boat seems like a great idea, but if you don't add sufficient venting, it can be a complete disaster. As the sun comes up every day condensation will form, and in no time flat mildew will begin a full frontal assault on your boat's cushions, curtains, and carpet.

Our best and most important winterizing advice? Whenever and wherever possible, instead of letting it sit unattended, use that boat! ■

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WINTERIZING YOUR BOAT *in 5 Easy Steps*

Last month we let you know about five winterizing disasters to avoid, and in the interest of all of us being able to fish again next spring, we figured it would be a good idea to run through the process of proper winterization, this month. But first, we want to congratulate anyone who hasn't yet winterized their boat. We hope that we made it clear in November, there's some awesome fishing to be done in our Mid-Atlantic bays and oceans right up into December — and in fact, beyond.

Still, we accept the fact that some of you won't launch the boat and run to a wreck in horizontal snow for some tog fishing in January, nor will you break through ice at the ramp to hit a power plant's warm water discharge. While we think you should change your ways, we get it (sort of). So here's the scoop on how to winterize your boat, in five easy steps.

1. Change the lower unit and powerhead oil on your outboard(s).

This needs to happen regardless of when you last changed the oil for two reasons: if any water got into the lower unit you'll avoid catastrophic freeze damage, and potential acid build-up on the powerhead oil means you should always change it before letting it sit for an extended period of time. Next, if the engine will sit for more than a month, either fog it with fogging fluid (if it's carbureted) or run gas treated with EFI fogging oil through the motor (if it's an EFI). Alternatively, you can simply hook up a water supply and run your engine until it's warm every other week; truth be told, the very best way to winterize an outboard is to use it.

After you've run the fogging fluid or oil through the system and shut the engine off, STOP right there. You do not need to run antifreeze through an outboard, period. They're designed to drain completely in the tilted-down position, and do not need an ounce of antifreeze.

That's it for outboards, but if you have a stern-drive or an inboard you will need to run antifreeze through it, you'll also have some plugs to pull and potentially a few other items to deal with depending on the brand; in the case of stern drives and inboards, we recommend breaking out the owner's manual or taking the boat to a pro.

- If you have an EFI outboard, fogging can be done via an oil added to a remote fuel supply.



2. Drain the systems.

Just pulling your boat will get the bulk of this job done when it comes to livewells and washdowns, but you can't depend on that completely. Usually there will be some water left behind in one or both systems. After the boat's on the hard, start by running the pumps for just a minute or two (you don't want to let them run dry too long or damage can occur). Then, pull the supply lines from the seacocks. Dump some non-toxic



WINTERIZING YOUR BOAT *in 5 Easy Steps*

antifreeze into a bucket (the pink stuff, not the green stuff), submerge the end of the supply line in the antifreeze, and run the pumps until you see the antifreeze come out the end of the washdown hose and the livewell intake. Finally, replace the end of the line on the seacock so you don't forget all about it, and have any mishaps when you launch again next spring.

Next, drain the water from and run antifreeze through any and all other onboard systems that have water in them. This includes freshwater systems, transom showers, heads, and the like. Use the same process of filling a bucket with antifreeze and inserting the end of the intake hose into the bucket, to get the pink stuff flowing through your boat's veins.

If your boat has a porta-pottie, you'll need some extra equipment: latex gloves, a latex body suit, rubber boots, and 12 cans of spray deodorant. After ensconcing yourself in the latex and rubber carry the porta-pottie to the gunwale of the boat, and yell at your kids until they submit to taking it inside and dumping the contents in the toilet. Then, much like fogging a carbureted outboard, use the deodorant to fog yourself, your house, and your kids.

Note: if you have a large boat with a stand-up head, a shower, a galley and the like, you should seriously consider taking the boat to a professional. We're penny pinchers, too, but even we realize that sometimes it's best to pay now instead of paying more, later.

3. Treat your fuel.

Even before ethanol became an issue, treating the fuel for winter storage was important. Gasoline loses octane over time, and gas laced with ethanol gathers water. We've used Star Tron in the past and found it effective, but since Formula X2 became a [redacted] advertiser we spent a season testing it, and discovered that it did an excellent job of getting rid of water in the fuel and keeping our test-engine running smooth. Check out

■ A shrink wrap heat gun doesn't belong in the hands of an amateur. Here Dustin Hoover, of Atlantic Shrink Wrap, gets ready to seal up a boat on a lift.



the video we shot of treating water-contaminated fuel with X2 on the [redacted] YouTube channel, or read about our test in the October Hot New Gear article on [redacted] .com, in the Gear section.

Whatever product you choose, the important thing is just to make sure that fuel is stabilized. And that means fuel in the lines, too. Just dumping this stuff into the fuel tank doesn't quite get the job done. You also need to start and run the engine for a few minutes to be sure the treated fuel has made its way through the entire system.

4. Cover your boat.

This is easier said than done – remember disaster number four, Terror of the Tarps, from last month? A poorly fitted cover can do more harm than good, wearing away a beautiful finish if stiff winter winds saw it back and forth against your gel coat or outboard cowls. There are only two good solutions: either get a custom-fitted cover (fitted covers are available for most popular powerboat models from companies like Westland) or have the boat shrink-wrapped. By the way, you know those DIY shrink-wrapping kits? Forgeddaboutit. A standard shrink wrap heat gun can be about 3500 degrees at the tip, and one wrong move can melt or ignite various parts of your boat. Again, this is a situation in which we recommend calling a pro.

If you opt for the fitted cover, don't buy the cheapest one on Amazon. These are made from nylon or a cotton-poly weave, and they won't fit well nor last long. Polyester or better yet acrylic (the stuff Sunbrella is made from) is a much better cover material. Also look for the ounce rating of the cover, which describes how many ounces a square yard of the material weighs. Two- or three-ounce cloth won't survive more than a season or two. Six- to 10-ounce cloth is the good stuff. And naturally, try to find a cover that's reinforced at stress points like window frames and transom corners.

5. Check on your boat on a regular basis, especially after heavy snow, rain, or wind.

Boat covers can work themselves free. Shrink wrap can get pierced or stretched. Vandalism happens. And if your boat becomes flooded or exposed due to any problems like these, the longer it sits without attention the worse the end result will be. We've all seen neglected boats sitting in a corner of the boatyard, with tattered covers flapping in the wind. They look like they haven't been attended to in weeks if not months, and often, that's because no one's been checking up on them. Those are the boats that probably won't be ready to use, come spring—and you don't want to risk missing the hottest bite of the year, just because your boat wasn't winterized properly. ■