

Winterisation

Autumn sometimes feels a little early to consider the prospect of setting up your boat for the winter. However, frosts are on their way and now is the time to consider what might be needed to protect a boat over the winter and make sure that you are ready to take advantage of an unexpected warm spell in the spring. Some things you can do yourself, others will need to be booked in with a professional - don't underestimate how many other people will be doing this as well so make sure you don't delay booking in services etc. In brief –

- Check your insurance policy – some stipulate you must lift your boat for a certain period and/or carry out certain maintenance jobs
- Antifouling - check adhesion, compatibility and re-coat based on your next season usage and cruising area
- Replacing your anodes - make sure you do this after you have antifouled leaving the old anodes in place
- Winterise your engine, plumbing and heads - important if the winter proves to be cold – don't wait until it is cold as it may be too late
- To stop condensation in fuel tanks, they should be filled as high as practically possible. The fuel needs to be treated with a stabiliser to keep the fuel fresh and stop corrosion and gum forming
- If you have power, make sure your batteries stay topped up; if you don't remove them
- Check the steering system
- Check and service sea cocks
- Lubricate transducers
- Get your gas system checked by a 'Gas Safe' registered engineer
- If you have a generator on board, service and winterise it
- Check and service all your safety equipment - remove as much as possible and send away for service/ or replacement
- Check 'fixtures and fittings' such as anchor chain and warp, rig tension, stanchion posts and what is normally underwater. Don't forget hinges, door handles etc
- Service winches – you can buy service kits or arrange for a qualified technician to do them for a relatively low cost
- Remove anything from down below that will attract and hold damp, such as cushions, clothes and food
- Bugs seek out nice warm places in the winter, like your boat! If you have any ventilators, leave them open to help stop condensation, but put some form of netting over to stop the bugs getting in
- Rig check - standing and running rigging, mast, boom, spinnaker pole and blocks
- Engine Service – and don't forget the sail drive. Best done at the same time as winterisation
- If the boat will be out of the water all winter, polishing the topsides will make the next seasons cleaning easier
- If power is available, you might consider putting a small greenhouse style frost-preventing heater or oil filled radiator in the boat. This will help reduce damp and condensation; but please make sure they are left somewhere that cannot be covered or meet anything flammable. We also recommend a dehumidifier; one from B&Q is fine. If you put it on a time switch, set it to come on in the middle of the day; this is when the air temperature will be warmest therefore moisture is held in the air and your dehumidifier will work hardest for you
- If you are going to leave your boat afloat and connected to shore power, it is advisable to make sure it's isolated from all the other boats on the same shore power circuit, otherwise they might start to use your anodes when theirs are exhausted
- Sails – remove all the sails and send them away for cleaning and any repairs then store them at home to stop dampness and decay
- Cleaning teak - leave until just before re-launch but before you re polish the topsides and re antifoul

In more detail –

The Engine and Drive system

We recommend that the annual service is completed at the same time as winterising the engine. Over the summer season the engine will have been slowly contaminating its oil with the usual chemicals that turn it from a nice clear green or gold colour, into a muddy grey colour. Over the winter, the oil will sit for a long while, and any water and acids dissolved in it will sit under the oil wherever it lays in the engine. Over the winter, these acids start to eat their way into the various metal bearings and the sump metal. Whilst it's not a problem over a winter or two, it does contribute to premature engine wear. A service will also highlight any issues with the engine that might then be solved over the winter months such as if water is found in the oil then there is a chance to cure the issue before it gets worse, or causes expensive gear corrosion whilst in storage. Winterising the engine makes sure that there is no longer any threat from water left in the cooling system that might freeze and cause damage. Everything is drained and anti-freeze is run in to vulnerable places.

Electrics

Marine batteries are more expensive than the usual car batteries because of their capacity to be deep discharged without sustaining damage. However, they are not immune to damage from incorrect storage. They need to be kept charged to prevent them freezing or degenerating whilst not in use. One of the most common springtime issues is the wholesale replacement of boat batteries that have been left flat over the entire winter, and as a result have suffered internal damage to the point that they will no longer hold enough charge to start the engine.

The Hull and Superstructure

It might also seem a strange thing to do, but the topsides will benefit from a clean and polish too. Falling leaves make some very annoying brown marks as they rot. If they fall on a polished surface, the effect is much reduced. Mould and organic growth have less to get their roots into if the boat is clean and the crevices are free of anything for the moss to get its roots into. Roots expand the gaps and cause woodwork to split. Dust and dirt in cracks and crevices attract moisture which freezes, and expands the joints leading to leaks.

Generally

Visit the boat regularly over the winter to just make sure all is as it should be. Covers blow about in the wind, allowing rainwater in. Are the bilge pumps still working ok? The more that can be done to protect the boat, either by servicing or removing vulnerable equipment, then the longer everything will last and the easier it will be to get back on the water in the spring.