

Cleaning your Boats:

During the early spring, most of us spend some time cleaning the house, clearing the yard, and generally getting things in condition for the upcoming warmer months. So it is with our boats. They too have been in a somewhat hibernated state for several months and will now be asked to perform for us as if nothing had happened.

Well, something usually HAS happened to our boats! For those of us who have kept the boats in the water during the winter months, and those who parked their boats on land, there is work to do. No matter where your boat spent the winter, there are some things that need to be done.

Go over the electrical system from the batteries to the generator to the appliances or lights they support to make sure everything works. You may only need to top off the water levels in your batteries. There are gauges (hydrometer) that you can use to measure the health of your batteries or take it to a garage or marina for the testing. Better to find out about health now than to have a battery death while on the water.

Check the oil level. Actually, if the engine has not been run much during the winter, you might want to go ahead and change the oil. Oil gets bad when your vessel just sits idle.

If you have an outboard, make sure the fuel line is intact and does not leak. Those rubber hoses and squeeze bulbs take a hit from sunshine, and from the fuel itself. They do not have a lengthy life. While I/Os and inboards have less of a problem, they also need checking. The same applies to any propane tanks and their lines.

If you have not run your engine for some time, don't be too surprised that it won't start or runs poorly once started. Suspect your fuel supply! Most of our engines run on auto gas, which does not have a long shelf life. Just setting there for several months, the gas is likely to have hatched all sorts of bad 'stuff' that gum up fuel lines, carburetors, spark plugs and fuel jets. There are additives to help alleviate this problem, but they really should have been added at the start of the winter.

In any event, you may want to top the tank off with fresh gas at the start of the boating season. Next winter, store the boat with a full tank and use the additive.

Make sure your radio works if you have one. If you don't, consider buying one! A marine radio is a real safety item – and a very inexpensive 'insurance' for your safety.

Check all of your lines (these are the ropes that when put on a boat are called lines.....there....(now you have some nautical knowledge) to make sure they have not frayed or torn. If they are, consider replacement. Don't forget the anchor rode. (That's a line that when attached to your anchor is called a rode. Now....you are really over-educated)

Likewise, check the life jackets and throwables. If they are worn or badly faded, consider replacement. They 'kinda' need to work the first time.....every time ! And.....BE SURE to check that they are "Coast Guard Approved". There are knock-offs out there. Life Jackets can be replaced.....your loved ones can't.

OK....you got the picture. Check everything! Either do it yourself or take it to your local marina or boat mechanic.

The last item to check and probably the most important is you – the Captain and your crew. You're the glue that holds everything together. The best kept boat in the world is not a safe one if the crew doesn't know how to operate it or follow the rules of the Marine environment.

If you're a little rusty in that area, come to one of the Coast Guard Auxiliary boating courses. They are held once a month from March through September at 252 River Road, Henrico, NC. This is Flotilla 93's 'headquarters'. This course is for the whole family, so make it a learning day in preparation for many happy days on the water.

For information and to enroll in the Boating Safety Class, contact the Flotilla at 252-535-3335, or visit their website at www.flotilla93.com.

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