

## Newspaper Article 18: Spring Cleaning for Boats

During the early spring, most of us spend some time, cleaning the house, clearing up the yard and generally getting things in condition for the summer 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.

The bottom of my aluminum-hulled boat looks like a jungle! Brown stuff abounds. If not removed, it will get worse and measurably slow down the boat and use more fuel. Besides, it looks pretty bad. It needs to be hauled out of the water and given a good power wash. While I'm at it, the cabin interior (it's a small houseboat) has a light patina of mold on the wooden walls and doors. A quick wipe down with Lysol and the looks and smell get better.

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 the 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 just setting there.

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.

I run my engine and generator every two weeks all year long. Engines like to be run – especially those that operate near water.

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

Check all of your lines (Those are 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 kind of need to work the first time, every time!

Well, you get 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.