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Winterizing Your Boat - Part III

From [Jim Shepard](#),
Your Guide to [Powerboating](#).
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Putting Your Boat to "Bed"

The following maintenance items should be done on an annual basis no matter *which* climate your boat calls "home". All boats require regular preventive maintenance. Failure to do so will probably end up costing you a lot of money and inconvenience. In my years of operating a marina, I found that over 90% of engine breakdowns and other calamities, that required expensive and lengthy repairs, were the result of failure to do routine maintenance. In other words, if you lavish a little TLC on your boat, she will probably take really good care of you.

1. Thru-Hull Fittings, Seacocks and Gate Valves:

- If you are dry storing, inspect all thru-hulls for any sign of cracking or corrosion, then lubricate all seacock plugs. Dismantle and grease all gate valves and reassemble. If you have bronze fittings on your boat, take a pen knife or a flat bladed screwdriver and scrape the surface of each fitting. If the scraped surface of the fitting is the color of "*gold*", the fitting is still sound. If it is the color of a "*copper penny*", it needs to be replaced pronto!
- If you are going to keep your boat in the water, close all seacocks, except the cockpit drains. Carefully inspect cockpit drain hoses and clamps.

2. Steering Systems:

- *Cable systems* – remove the cables from their conduits, inspect for any signs of wear or fraying, then grease and reinstall. Inspect and lubricate all pulleys and sheaves.
- *Rack and Pinion Systems* – Remove the top plate and input socket screws. Next clean, grease and reinstall.
- *Hydraulic Steering Systems* - Top off the fluid level and check all hoses for signs of leakage.

3. Stoves:

- Drain a little kerosene or alcohol, as the case may be, from your storage tank and check for water.
- If you use propane or CNG, close the valve at the cylinder, then light the stove and burn off any remaining gas in the line. Replace filaments and igniters at least every other year.

4. Stuffing Boxes:

- If you have an inboard propulsion system, you have a hole in the bottom of your boat where the drive shaft goes through. This device is called the **shaft log**. On the inboard side of the shaft log is the **stuffing box**. This handy little gadget keeps the water from flooding your boat. (Remember, the only thing that a boat wants to do on its own is to sink!)
- If you are dry storing, remove the old packing. There is an inexpensive device that's a cross between a screw and a hook, called a "Flax Packing Extractor", which makes this job relatively easy. Replace with new waxed flax. (NOTE: I am not a fan of the new Teflon[®] coated flax.) *Do **not** over tighten!*
- If you are storing in the water, tighten the stuffing box nut to stop any dripping. **Don't forget to back the nut off in the spring!** Failure to do so will result in damage to your drive shaft from overheating.

5. Boat Trailers:

- In my many years of messing about in boats, I have had trailers break in two, come off the hitch and have had wheels come off and pass me going down the road. With these experiences in mind, I have decided that, if I were forced to choose, I would rather have a great trailer supporting a "so-so" boat than the other way around.
- Inspect the trailer bunks and rollers to make sure they are in good order and are supporting your boat properly.
- Inspect the tires for wear, sidewall rot, gouges or cuts. Then coat them with a protectorant, such as *Armor-Ail*[®] or *Formula 2001*[®]. Remove the wheels; repack the wheel bearings and reinstall.
- Inspect the brake linings for wear. If you use a surge brake system, make sure it is clean and well lubricated.
- Inspect, clean and lubricate the winch and cable.
- Check all wiring for any chaffing, corrosion or broken wires. Spray all electrical connections with *WD-40*[®] or the like to keep moisture out.
- I recommend both a hitch lock for the trailer and a chain and lock to secure the trailer to something immovable. Also, wheel chocks are a great safety feature.
- Replace any burned out running or brake lights.

Electronics:

- A word about the need to remove your electronics during the winter lay-up. Unless you have the luxury of heated, inside storage for your boat, cold, damp weather with many temperature changes can raise cane with your expensive VHF radio, Depth Sounder/Fish-finder, GPS/Chart Plotter and Radar, etc.
- I've been told by electronic experts that temperatures of -20° F can destroy an LCD display. So, disconnect and remove them and store in a warm, dry place.
- The folks that make and sell marine electronics call leaving your equipment aboard during the winter, "Job Security." Enough said?

Well, that should be enough to keep us all busy. Remember, all the things you do to get your boat ready for "bed" this fall, will help eliminate some of the weeping, wailing and rending of garments that often accompanies spring commissioning. If I've missed something you think is important, please [email](#) me with your suggestions/procedures and I'll see about adding them to this list.

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