

Time to Winterize Your Boat

by Hank Parker

For many anglers and boat owners, the onset of winter means an end to the boating season. As temperatures continue to drop around the country, it is now time to start thinking about the final preparations that will guarantee your next season starts off on the right track. The time and energy that you spend now protecting your boat will not only enhance your boat's performance, but it will save you both time and money next season. The first step to winterizing a boat, as when you are preparing for a departure, is to make a checklist of all the tasks that are need to be accomplished. The owner's manual for both your boat and motor are great resources to help ensure that no task is left off your list. Once your checklist is complete, remember to store it in a safe place so that it can be used again next year. If you are a new boat owner or if you have questions, ask an experienced friend for assistance or call a professional. The following is a list of protective measures that should be incorporated into your checklist. First, fill the fuel tanks and add the appropriate amount of stabilizer. Remember to run the engine long enough to get the treated gas into the fuel line and engine. If the fuel tanks are left untreated over the winter, the gasoline will deteriorate into the varnish and gum, making starting difficult. Next, it is time to flush the enclosed cooling systems. You can purchase a flushing kit from your local boat dealer. Also, remove the block plugs and drain all the water from the inboard/outboard engines. This will clean out any rust flakes and sediment that has accumulated. Then, pump in anti-freeze to avoid trapped ice pockets and be sure to use an environmentally safe product. Now, it is time to fog the engine with oil in order to prevent rust. Follow the instructions that come with the product, making sure to spray some of the oil into the cylinders through the sparkplug holes once the engine has cooled down. Remember to check the spark plugs and replace them as necessary. Next, replace the oil and oil filter on the four-cycle engines. Once complete, change the lower unit gear case lubricant on the engine to prevent water that is trapped in the gear case from freezing. Another helpful tip is to disconnect the battery cables and then remove the battery from the boat. Clean the terminal ends of the battery and store the battery in a cool dry place. Another good idea is to check your prop for nicks and damage. If left unchecked, blade damage can cause vibrations that could ruin other engine parts and the drive system. Other items on your checklist should include: draining water from the bilges and leaving the transom drain unplugged, examining trailer tires, greasing wheel bearings on trailer and replacing as needed, checking bulbs and electrical contacts on trailer and consulting your owner's manual for tips that are particular to your boat, engine and trailer. Now is also a good time to inspect and store electronic equipment. First, unplug power cords and remove the fish finders from the boat. They should be stored inside away from the extreme winter cold. These products work just as good in January as they did in August but prolonged storage in cold is not recommended. Apply anti-oxidants to terminal connections to reduce oxidation potential and inspect components looking for cracks in transducer or cables. Once you have fully serviced, inspected and cleaned your boat, it is now time to cover and store the boat for the winter. When covering the boat, remember to allow air circulation under the boat cover to prevent mildew. It may sound like a lot of work, but all of these steps are crucial in order to keep your boat at its best condition. Whether you decide to do it yourself or request the services of a marina, winterizing your boat is the best thing you can do to assure a successful new season. By following these steps, you will be ready to hit the water like the pros instead of being stranded on land like a rookie. A two-time winner of the Bassmaster Classic, Ranger Pro Hank Parker is the host of "Hank Parker's Outdoor Magazine."

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