



# Ask Dr. Gel

by Dave Weakley



Dave Weakley is the owner of American Boat Restoration and has been keeping boaters afloat in fine trim and good repair for over 40 years.

"Email me or call me with your questions! I'll be happy to help you out"  
americanboatrestoration.com / email: boatrepair@aol.com / Office: 413.665.7424 / Cell: 518.577.7799

## Go Boating to Social Distance!

**G**oing boating is a great way to get out and have some fun especially after being cooped up for several months!

We have a new customer who we met by accident which is how we meet many of our clients. They thought boating would be a great way to keep their social distance during the pandemic and have fun with their young family at the same time.

So they bought a nice starter boat, obtained registration and insurance. They made sure they had the required State and Coast Guard safety equipment, filled the boat with gas, checked that the drain plug was in and off to the river they went. One of the most important things

they did not do was to check a navigational chart for the river they were about to go on. No one on board knew the river channel.

As they were cruising along the water at 35-40 mph they suddenly came to an abrupt halt on a unmarked rock pile that was just below the surface of the water. Fortunately no one was injured! The boat sustained serious damage as you can image and see in the photos. The outdrive is totaled.

It ripped off with such force that the drive came up and hit the transom rub rail and broke part of it and the fiberglass underneath it. On the hull along the keel the damage is approx. a ten foot long area of serious fractured fiberglass and gelcoat breakage. It's early June and sadly the boat grounding will postpone this family boating for a few weeks.

**Before you leave the dock...  
Take time to know the waterway you  
are about to venture out on!**

### Damage can be quite extensive

by running your boat aground. Just recently, I had three customers who were barely outside of the channel and unfortunately wrecked their transoms and hulls.

I have also worked on keels, bow thruster tubes, chines, and strakes for the same reason – running aground!

Once damage is done to the fiberglass, it is of vital importance to get your repair done properly. When a hull smashes hard into a rock pile, or any other submerged object the fiberglass becomes broken, fractured and delaminated. The hull will absorb water if it's not repaired promptly.

There is a limit to the flexibility in the fiberglass. When flexed beyond its limit it will shatter and cannot recover its original shape and elastic properties. Shattered fiberglass will look gray in color; good fiberglass will look dark purple. To

determine the extent of damage, it is necessary to grind the damaged areas until good fiberglass is found. You cannot begin a repair until there is solid fiberglass to build on. There are times when the hull is breached to the inside. There are tests that can be done to determine the amount of delaminating; one is a "light test". The light will show transparency through shattered fiberglass. In my opinion, a breached hull should

**Being on the rocks can ruin  
your day, cause injuries and  
be an embarrassing scene.**

be repaired on the inside and outside of the hull to restore the structural integrity. You do not have to have a hole in your boat to have it leak. The shattered fiberglass

and fibers will allow water to migrate into the laminates.

If a repair is not done correctly, then it is very likely that a potential disaster has been covered up cosmetically. The improper repair will allow additional flexing of the boat, which over time can cause further delaminating and breakage.





**New to boating? Take a Boating Safety Course!**

They are available online – Check out [www.boatus.org/courses](http://www.boatus.org/courses).

**And let's all Remember Boat Launch Etiquette**

Use it before the guy behind you gets irritated and decides not to Social Distance – And screaming makes more droplets!

**1-** Get your boat ready to launch in the staging area. You won't be rushed and you'll likely do your prep safely and properly. That means take your tie downs off, check the oil, make sure the plug is in, put your cooler and gear in, tie a line to the bow if needed, etc; whatever you have to do!

**2-** After the launch and at the end of the day clear the ramp area as quickly and safely as possible, No bright lights on your tow vehicle if it is dark please! It's hard to back down a boat trailer with someone's headlights in your mirrors.

**3-** Don't jump the line of those waiting to launch or load.

**4-** Don't hog the ramp! If there are multiple lanes use just one! Clear the ramp when safe to do so and promptly!

**5-** Leave and return to the ramp area with no wake A little common courtesy helps things go smoothly!

**6-** Tell your guests not to park in spaces designated for tow vehicles and trailers!

**7-** Communicate with your family with the procedures you'll be taking. Try not to yell and scream!

***It is recommended during the Covid-19 Pandemic that you limit the people aboard to family members from your household- no guests. Enjoy your summer boating, practice Social Distance, follow CDC Guidelines and be safe!***

Photos show deep fractures in the fiberglass laminate.

