

Over 45 Years in Business

'Ask Dr Gel' • 18 Years in Boating on the Hudson

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 45 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

"Where is this water coming from?"

Generally, boats shouldn't take on water. But boating is a water sport and it can be expected! At some point most boat owners will experience unwanted water. You're driving your boat, skimming across the water and making sharp turns not knowing the water is seeping in up under the loose rub rail seam and working its way down the inside of your boat. Water can be coming into a boat from a number of different sources. It does not necessarily mean you have a hole in your boat!

Two friends of mine who are avid and very knowledgeable boat owners have identical boarding stairs. The stairs are constructed of molded fiberglass with a plywood core material. Both of them had stainless steel hand railings installed. Whoever did the installation did not use sealant around the screws and under the flanges. Because sealant was

not used water was able to seep into the plywood core. The plywood became soft and allowed the stairs to flex causing cracks in the gelcoat and fiberglass. As the plywood rotted away there was less and less support; the fiberglass flexed so much it became pulverized. The stairs can be repaired but it would be so much work it would be cheaper to buy a new set. The same thing that happened to the stairs could happen to the deck and/or hull of your boat. More and more often I am seeing soaked up and rotted core material in the area of decks, around cleats, floors, transoms, window frames, engine hatch covers, seat bases, etc. If there are any areas of peeling and/or missing sealant it is an invitation for problems. It must be removed and replaced. In addition; if you drill any new holes to change or add new hardware be sure to use a good grade marine sealant. There is a sealant specific to each application. Continuous water problems may cause the boat flotation to become soaked up! I have removed water saturated flotation that I was able to wring out

Gelcoat damage hidden by trailer bunk



Fiberglass cracks hidden by trailer bunk



like I was squeezing a wet sponge. The excessive moisture can easily add hundreds of pounds to your boat. Once it is in the flotation and in the wood it will never dry out. Never, ever! Removal and replacement is the only option.

Possible reasons why your boat is taking on water are:

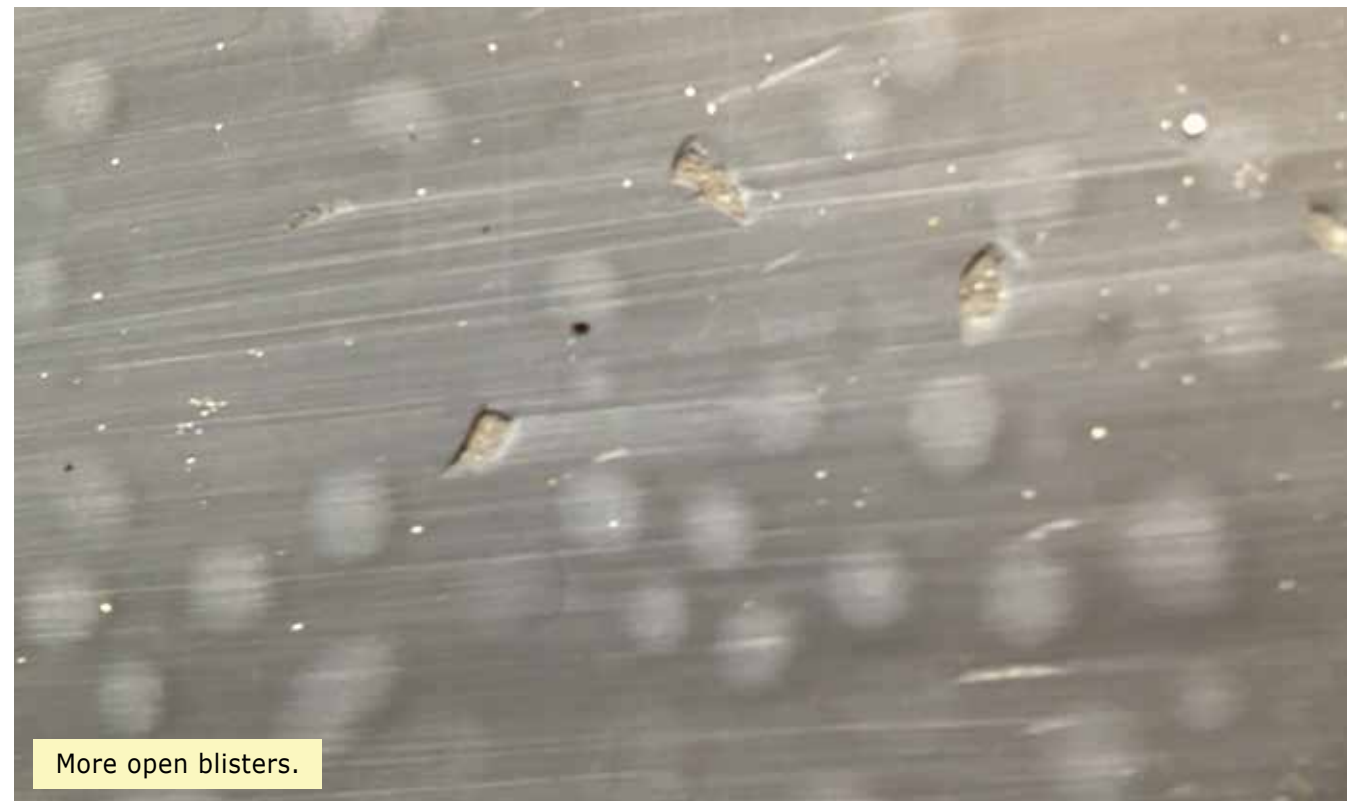
- Unsealed thru-hull fittings
- Rotted transom
- Loose Hull-Deck Fasteners causing separation of the two
- Rotted rub rail core
- If the boat has rubber twist in drain plugs, water can enter your hull through the rear drain plugs, especially if they are older and the rubber has lost the elasticity to complete a good seal. Sometimes the drain plug tube or fitting has become loose or the sealant around the tube-to-hull seal has become weak.
- Loose bolts and screws -Even screws that are three to five turns lose can take more significant quantities of water
- Damaged bellows- If you have a stern drive it would be a good idea to start inspecting the issue from the engine. The gasket is made out of rubber and can get damaged as it ages.



Very rotted stringer in Ski boat.



Osmotic blisters cracked open allowing water intrusion.



More open blisters.



This transom should be straight across but because of cracked fiberglass in two places and rot developed.



More blisters hidden by trailer bunks caused by boat laying on constant wet carpet.

- Loose hose connections Check all hoses
- Livewell- not sealed well or overflowing
- Leaks on the hull from obvious holes, osmotic blisters and fractures through the gelcoat and into the fiberglass
- Damaged seacock
- Leak in the cooling system
- Loose or bad packing on the prop shaft
- Loose speedometer pickup hose
- Faulty Exhaust System - Water is used to cool exhaust gases, there are many cases where leaks in the system can allow a lot of water on board. E.g. cracked hoses, broken muffler, loose clamps, etc, Check the boat storage lockers. It's a convenient place to stuff all your wet lines, life/ski vests, etc. but these usually carpeted compartments absorb moisture. It's a big sponge in the center of the boat! The lifting hole in the cover allows additional water access. It can always be damp and never has a chance to dry out due to lack of ventilation. The moisture works its way up the sides of the compartment into the underside of the plywood floor.

Are there cracks in the hull not visible because they are hidden by trailer bunks?

I have repaired cracks in hulls due to structural problems. Headers or stringers for example that are installed too tight when the boat was built causing pressure to develop on the hull causing cracks in the fiberglass.

Check the boat canvas. Repair any holes or tears. Is the fabric still water proof? If not additional water proofing can be applied.

Wet kids jumping in and out of the boat!

However, small amounts of water getting in the boat aren't that big of a deal, but if it seems to be an unusual amount you need to address it ASAP to prevent further damages. As added insurance, be sure your auto bilge is always working. So, even if you see small quantities of water inside the bilge area or engine compartment or elsewhere on the boat, try to address it quickly.

Try to keep your boat as dry as possible without "going overboard!"

*We want to thank all of those who read Ask Dr Gel!
I hope my articles have been helpful!
Email me with your questions, I'd be happy
to offer advice! - boatrepair@aol.com*

*Wishing you all a Merry Christmas! & Happy
Holidays! Cheers to a Healthy,
Prosperous and Sunny 2023!*

*We are sending our thoughts and prayers to
Family & Friends impacted by storm Ian.
We wish them a speedy recovery!*
