

Ask Dr. Gel

by Dave Weakley

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"Email me or call me with your questions! I'll be happy to help you out"
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The rituals of Spring as a boat owner.

Out of storage finally! Remove the winter cover / canvas or shrink wrap

Once the cold season is over and milder temperatures arrive it's time to pull the storage cover off your boat. March sun feels pretty warm! April and May temps can really heat up the inside of a shrink wrap boat. To prevent mold stains and the smell of gas, it's important to get that wrap off and cover your boat with your canvas or at least very carefully slit open areas of shrink wrap allowing ventilation!

I've been repairing boats for close to 50 years. The info I am sharing with you is backed by my experience and hopefully it will be helpful to new boat owners and seasoned ones as well. It is intended to make you aware of the factors needed to keep a boat in good shape, and the reasons why a lot of damage occurs, what to do if it happens, how to prevent it, and how to care for your investment. It's not meant to worry you as a boat owner but to educate you so you can take action when the situation arises.

I decided to share information in two parts; this issue and next issue because there is so much. Some information is already known by many but for new boaters it's important to share.

"Did you know?" "Magic Eraser" will scratch your gelcoat! It looks to be doing a wonderful job cleaning when it is wet. But when it dries all the scratch damage appears! It was a huge expense to remove all the scratches for one of my customers!

Hardware check:

Tighten screws, nuts, bolts, etc on bow eyes, seating, cleats, ladders, swim platform bolts, windlass, railings, antennas, electronics, windshields, rub rails, engine and transom, biminis, hatch doors, etc Clean and polish metal with a good metal polish.

Time to clean

Ideally you cleaned your boat when you put it away! Right? So Spring cleaning won't be monumental and you're ready to go! It is a good idea to give your boat a fresh wash and inspection after storage. Get out the hose, cleaning buckets, sponges, micro fiber cloths, gloves etc.! Fiberglass boats need to have a good surface protection so that algae, dirt, grime and critters can't adhere to the gelcoat. Spring clean with a good marine "boat wash" or "boat soap" - 3M, Seachoice, Starbrite, Marykate, etc. are brands to consider. They are mild detergents which should not remove the sealer glaze and wax. You can use Star Brite Instant Hull Cleaner, Spray-nine, Fantastic, or On-Off, etc. They are all good cleaners, won't damage your gelcoat, but they will eventually remove the protection your boat should have such as sealer glaze and wax. The boat will be like a magnet if the defense is removed.

1. Spray and then wash your boat down with your boat wash.
2. Compound the gelcoat using top quality Marine products. See more info about proper compounding techniques further in this article.
3. Apply a good coat of marine sealer glaze being careful to completely cover the gelcoat.
4. Next apply a high-quality marine UV protecting wax.
5. After you apply an ample coat of sealer glaze and wax the boat should be protected from stubborn stains and grime for a while at least!
6. Clean your boat often during the season by using the "Boat Wash" and don't hesitate to wax it regularly throughout the season. Protect your gelcoat like you protect yourself from sunburn

Examine the Gelcoat

- Check deck and hull for oxidation, gelcoat cracks, scratches, gashes, airvoids, etc. It's best to repair any gelcoat problems sooner than later to avoid worse problems and more expense down the road.
- Check for osmotic blisters. Repair is highly recommended.

- Reglaze and wax if your hull was cleaned with an acid wash (e.g. On-Off) All the gelcoat sealer protecting properties are gone and need replacing!
- If your boat is going to be in the water all season, seriously consider applying epoxy barrier on hull from the waterline down. It is the best protection you can provide on your hull to help prevent osmotic blistering
- Touch up or replace antifouling paint

Marine Sealants

I often see soaked up and rotted core material in the area of decks, around cleats, floors, transoms, window frames, engine hatch covers, seat bases, under rub rails, hull/deck joints, port lights, etc. If there are any areas of peeling and/or missing sealant it is an invitation for problems. It must be removed and replaced.

Never use silicone! I'm not a fan of it. In my opinion there is no place on a boat to use silicone. It dries out, flakes, shrinks and falls out. Use Marine Sealant, I favor 3M

There is a sealant specific to each application. Be sure to use the right one for the job. Here's technical info from 3M that will be helpful.

- Sealant 101 - High quality polysulfide bedding and deck seam sealant. Chemically cures to form a firm, rubbery water tight seal. Use above and below water line. Seals between mechanically fastened joints on wood, metal, fiberglass and most plastics. Becomes tack free in 5 hrs and remains permanently flexible. Has excellent resistance to chemicals and weathering, salt water, and stress caused by joint movement.
- 3M Adhesive Sealant Fast Cure 4000UV - Superior UV resistant, remains flexible, use above & below

water line. Good for sealing deck to hull joints, thru- hull fittings, window and door frames, deck hardware, etc.

- 3M Adhesive/Sealant 5200 - Workable up to 4 hrs, tack free in 48 hrs, cures 5-7 days. No shrinkage remains flexible, won't sag or flow, bonds and seals well. Use above & below water line. Excellent resistance to weathering and salt water. Note- this is a permanent sealant! You could do damage to your boat taking it apart, so use wisely!
- 3M Adhesive/Sealant Fast Cure 4200- General all purpose polyurethane that chemically reacts with moisture to deliver flexible bonds with good adhesion to fiberglass, gelcoat, wood, plastics and metals. Paint-able and sand-able. Not recommended for sealing wood decks. Teak cleaners or sealers may soften it. Forms water tight and weather-resistant seals on joints and hardware.
- 3M Adhesive/Sealant Fast Cure 5200 - Tack free in one hour, fully cures in 24 hrs. Seal is exceptionally strong and stays flexible. It retains strength above and below water line. Won't sag or flow. Bonds and seals port holes and deck fittings, motors on fiberglass transoms, under moldings, etc. Note- this is a permanent sealant! You could do damage to your boat taking it apart, so use wisely!