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Winter Upkeep Tips

By: Dave Trostle

As a fellow boater, Sterling Acceptance's Vice President Dave Trostle understands that the off-season months can be hard on our boats. However, some of the lasting effects can be avoided with just a little extra caution and care. Read Dave's tips below on how to better protect your recreational investment in the winter for your spring and summer adventures!

- Tip 1. We're currently in the middle of another deep freeze across the Mid-Atlantic, Northeast, and Great Lakes. But there's some good news—only two months left until the semi-official start of the boating season here in the Mid-Atlantic! This winter has been one of the coldest in years, with rivers, harbors, and tributaries freezing over for a period of time. Depending on how your boat is stored, it's a good idea to check on it every two weeks (if possible) to make sure everything is in the same condition as when you winterized it.
- Tip 2. If your boat is stored on land, check the jack stands to ensure they haven't shifted. The freezing and thawing cycle can cause the ground to move underneath the stands, especially if they're not on a paved surface. Over the past month, some areas have experienced extremely high, near-hurricane-force winds due to severe weather systems. A loose or flapping cover can cause significant chafing damage to your boat's gel coat if left unchecked. If the cockpit isn't covered, be sure to inspect the scuppers. Ice and snow buildup, followed by heavy rain, can lead to serious damage if the scuppers are blocked and unable to drain.
- Tip 3. If your boat is in the water, have you checked the lines? Extreme tides and high winds can stretch the lines and cause chafing on the boat. I typically find myself adjusting the lines two or three times during the first few weeks after winterization. Have you done a walkthrough to make sure all the thru-hulls are clear? I've seen several cases where thru-hulls or hoses freeze during winter, and when the thaw hits, the boat starts taking on water. The bilge pumps can't keep up because the battery charger has been off, and the batteries are low. I don't leave the charger on during the winter, but every few weeks, I turn it on for a few hours to recharge the batteries.

- Tip 4. Keeping the scuppers clear is crucial if your boat is in the water during the winter, more so than if it's on land. Do you use a bubbler system to circulate the water around your boat? Don't assume it will run properly all winter without regular inspections. We once had a workboat, attempting to break ice in the marina, hit ours and completely destroy the system.
- Tip 5. Now is the time to tackle those projects or 'to-do' items you've been planning while your boat is laid up. If you're having a yard handle the work, it's a good idea to contact them now while things are slow. This way, you can get on their schedule early and be at the top of the list before spring arrives. They might even be able to take care of some tasks on the warmer winter days. Ultimately, being proactive about protecting your investment will pay off in the long run, leading to more enjoyable and trouble-free days on the water