



Get a Head Start on Spring!

Spring Suggestions for the Smart Way to Begin the Boating Season

By John Strong, Principal Marine Surveyor

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The days are getting longer, the weather is at least a little nicer, and it won't be long until it's time to get your boat ready to launch. ACE Recreational Marine Insurance's Marine Advisory Services team is pleased to offer you some important tips to help you prepare your boat for a safe, enjoyable cruising season.

- Before the launch, be sure the bottom paint and zincs are in good condition. Inspect all the fittings below the waterline and repair or replace any through-hulls that need attention. Check any plastic fittings above the waterline too, since they can be damaged by sunlight, and pay close attention to the fittings in the bootstripe. Be sure all transducers are clean and free of marine growth, all intakes are clean, and bottom paint is in good condition. Make certain props are straight, shaft bearings are in good shape, and check swim step supports, trim tabs, boarding ladders, rudders and thrusters. Outdrive fluid should be clean and free of water, and the bellows at the transom deserves a close look. A failed bellows can sink a boat, so replace it if it isn't perfect! Be sure exhaust ports are clear and in good shape.
- When you're finished outside the boat, go inside and check seacocks, strainers, vented loops, hoses and hose clamps. Look at stuffing boxes, exhaust hoses and mufflers. Be sure muffler drain plugs are in place. Replace cooling system zincs and drive belts if needed. Run the steering gear from hard left to hard right to be sure it's working fine. Battery water levels should be full, and connections should be clean and tight. Does the hull have a drain plug? Be sure it's in place!
- Be present at launching so you can go below and check for leaks as soon as the boat is in the water. If a sailboat's mast was removed for storage, it will be stepped when the boat is afloat. Inspect the spar, standing rigging and wiring beforehand, and secure the turnbuckles with cotter pins after the rig is tuned. Before starting any engines, be sure that the seawater intake seacocks are open. Keep an eye on the gauges, watching for abnormal engine temperature or oil pressure, as you move the boat to her mooring.
- Once the boat is on her mooring or in her slip, walk the decks and check the anchor gear, lifelines, mooring lines and life rings. If the boat's on a mooring buoy, pay close attention to the mooring bridle. Set up the canvas, close all the windows and hatches, and give the boat a good washing. Then go below and check for leaks, and make a note of any you find so they can be repaired before the next storage season.
- If you connect to shore power, be sure both ends of the cord, and the receptacles on the boat and the dock, are in perfect condition. Replace any fittings that have any sign of heat damage. Once the boat is plugged in, be sure the battery charger is working.





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- The next step is to warm up the engines and generators for the spring oil change. While they're warming up, check battery voltage to be sure alternators are working. If the boat is fairly new, or if you've had any motor mounts replaced, check engine alignment before the first cruise.
- You'll then want to drain and flush the domestic water system, and fill the water tanks. Turn on the pump and check the system for leaks. Open the valve on the propane tank, turn on the solenoid valve and light a burner on the stove. Then turn off the burner, leave the solenoid valve open, and close the valve on the tank. Note the reading on the pressure gauge, wait 10 minutes, and read the gauge again. If the reading has changed, use soapy water to find the leak and repair it before using the stove.
- Reviewing safety items is critical and you can begin by checking the lifejackets, flares and first aid kit. Be sure the horn, running lights, anchor light and searchlight work properly. Check the fire extinguishers and change the batteries in the smoke and CO detectors. Make certain the boat's registration or documentation is current, and that all the required papers are on board. Start a "punch list" of things that will need attention before the end of the season.

For more detailed and valuable safety information, please read ACE's **Coming out of Lay-up** brochure. Complimentary copies are available from your insurance agent and by visiting www.acemarineinsurance.com and clicking on the Boating Safety and Loss Prevention link.

Before you haul out this fall, remember to ask your marine insurance agent or visit www.acemarineinsurance.com for copies of our **Going into Lay-up** brochure and **Winter Wisdom** summary, more helpful safety resources available at no charge from the Marine Advisory Service professionals at ACE Recreational Marine Insurance. Have a great summer!

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