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It is now November with the winter chill tapping at the door. Many local "die hard" boaters indicated that they would extend the season for fishing or just personal

pleasure and have asked what to do to an outboard engine if left in the water. Considering

that the cooling water should drain from the head and lower unit when shut down, there should be no negative effects leaving an engine to the elements. Most marinas keep a work boat operating all winter for dock and piling work.

I have experienced only one damaged lower unit resulting from complete lack of maintenance. There must have been water in the lower gear case and extreme temperatures caused freezing and deterioration of the gears. It was spring when the owner asked me to inspect the vessel, but damage had already been done. Some of the newer outboards are equipped with "flushing plugs" which allow an easy fresh-water flush during the season and a possible non-toxic anti-freeze flush for the off-season, but as mentioned, storing the outboard vertically as intended should allow all water to drain from the unit.

Proper winterization calls for first flushing the cooling system with clean fresh water and washing any dirt, grease, etc. from the exterior of the engine. Smaller outboards can be put in a bucket or barrel. Secure the motor so it doesn't touch the sides or bottom of the bucket. "Ear muffs" can be used with the attachment of a garden hose. As mentioned before, some larger engines have a "flushing plug" which attaches to the garden hose. Run the engine for 5 to 10 minutes. Step two is to drain the fuel from the engine to purge the carburetor and prevent the build-up of deposits. While running, disconnect the fuel hose and allow the engine to run dry. Remove the spark plugs and use a fogging oil to coat the pistons and cylinder walls. With the plugs removed, the oil can be sprayed in and the crank turned to spread the oil. Change to lower unit gear oil and apply a water-resistant grease to the propeller shaft and threads. Coat the engine head with a protective oil spray and use a good wax on the exterior cowling.

Inboard engines, if fresh-water cooled, need to have the anti-freeze protection tested. The raw water cooling jacket and manifold require the application of anti-freeze usually by closing the intake sea cock, removing the hose and extending it to a bucket of antifreeze mixture. Run the engine until the mixture color (usually red, see note*) is seen from the exhaust and then fog the engine with an oil spray via the carburetor to shut down. * Note: The environment frowns on spilling toxic anti-freeze onto its waterfront. This product is green in color and can be use in automobiles, but for marine use the non-toxic anti-freeze is colored red or to some it is just pink. Prior to this action, warming the



by Michael Kurnides

engine to temperature and changing the lubricating oil is recommended. Removing the spark plugs and spraying fogging oil is also recommended and necessary for fuel-injected engines without carburetors. A complete exterior cleanup and inspection

of the raw water impeller should be on the schedule.

Diesel engines mostly are fresh-water cooled and need the same checks and flushing, except that no fogging is required due to the heavier oil-based nature of the fuel. In all cases an appropriate fuel stabilizer should be used for storage.

Stern drives need an inspection to remove any plant life or barnacles. The lower unit oil should be drained and checked for any excessive moisture in the oil. Grease all fittings and check the level of hydraulic fluid in the steering and lift arms. It is recommended that water pump impellers, as found in some lower units, be changed every two (2) seasons.

The fresh water system should be completely drained. Isolate the hot water heater by disconnecting the in and out lines and connect them together. This way when running some non-toxic antifreeze into the system, you won't be filling the whole water heater, which equates to 6, 10.5 12 or 20 gallons of liquid. Some anti-freeze should be added to the heater due to the lack of complete draining from the water hose connections. The bilge should be cleaned and dried, with the addition of a little anti-freeze there, too.

(Another note: Surveyors like clean bilges.)

Pump out the holding tank and add fresh water, flushing several times and finally introducing antifreeze to the hoses, tank, "Y" valve and macerator. Batteries should be fully charged and stored in a dry place. As mentioned, over the years, because of low cost, most batteries are left aboard and our mild winters have not been shown to cause damage if the batteries are fully charged.

After taking care of the systems - or before - remove any valuables, electronics, loose items, etc. Open drawers, cabinets, refrigerator doors, etc. to allow for air circulation. This is important to prevent mildew. Likewise, the overall cover or shrink-wrap should offer free air circulation during the winter sleep.

By following the basic steps above, your yacht should be well protected for the off-season. Review owner's manuals for manufacturer's recommendations. If you don't feel confident in this attempt, don't hesitate to seek out professional help to do the job.

Time to enjoy the holidays. Hoping the winter isn't too harsh....

Fair Winds,
Michael Kurnides