

Over the past two months, the reels were cleaned and repaired, the rods were given a damage assessment and went to the shop for repairs, and the discussion of hooks was handled. It's time now to get the boat ready and do a risk evaluation prior to getting wet in April. Everyone gets wet in April so that you can do your shakedown runs and de-bunk everything that doesn't work. Just stay in the channels; the local buoys won't be placed on station yet.

The Jets and the Giants blew their Super Bowl chances, and the deer and duck seasons on Long Island ended in January.

So, considering the warmth of the winter and the lack of distractions, you will have done all of the work I laid out previously. Everyone took advantage of the fine fall and early winter and kept his or her boat in the water until Christmas, at least. You didn't haul out and miss the end of stripers and the inshore black-fishing, did you, or even the herring run? You have plenty of brined herring filets frozen for fluke bait or whole herring for shark, tuna and bluefish, right? I'll wager most of you hauled out at the first touch of a chill and have been glued to the sofa for three months.

Last October was the time for you to have done your risk assessment on your boat. At the end of a long season when you start cleaning out the boat and locker is the right time to have a notepad on hand. You should have written notes

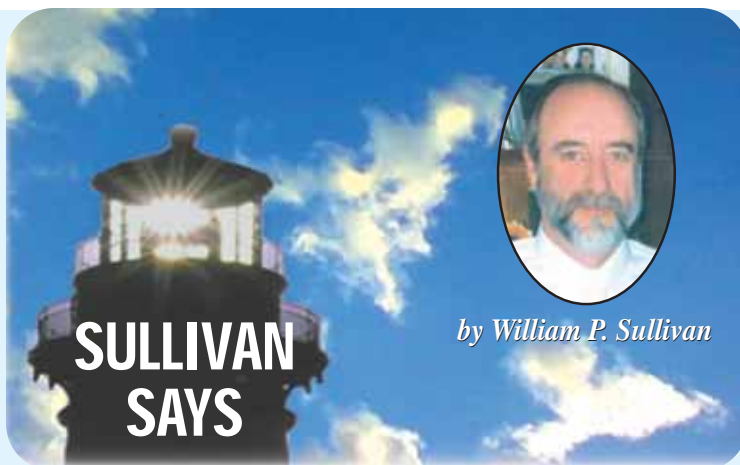
on what needed replacement, the state of your life jackets and flares, tools that were rusted or lost, gel-coat cracks, canvas tears and weatherworn seams or snaps. There are the "nice to haves" like a new cutting board, knife-block, new knives and, of course, the "must haves" like a lost anchor replacement, more anchor line, new radio, antenna, running lights, and new wiring. There are a lot of things that we keep together late in the season with duct tape, wire ties, and a lick and a prayer that need to be taken care of properly this spring.

When you hauled, if you brought home the canvas and plastic curtains, you will want to pull those out and check the snaps, zippers and seams. The plastic drop curtains may be cracked or covered in brown gunk. Check them, clean them or make an appointment with the canvas shop now for repairs or replacements.

Check your maintenance log (you keep one of those, right?). Outboard engines should have the water pumps replaced every two seasons and some people do it every year. How old are your batteries? Clean the terminals and all of the connections to your electronics and fuse blocks. Another thing that needs to be looked at early is your propeller. Is it dinged, bent or chipped? Do you want to get rid of the aluminum and upgrade to stainless? Do you want to change the pitch or go from three to four blades? Think of that.

Bottom paint, zincs, bleach, metal polish, compound, wax, bilge cleaner, WD-40, electric contact cleaner, different-size brass wire brushes to clean the fuse panels and connections, grease, deck and streak cleaner and Rain X are just a few items you may want to pick up.

Then think tools. Start with a polisher/buffer and stop hand-waxing. Check for



by William P. Sullivan

screwdrivers of different sizes and heads, wrenches, deck brushes, hand brushes, rags, buckets, stepladder, a cold case of Bud and three friends.

When it warms up later in the month, pull off the cover and assess the task at hand. It's still cold outside, so let's concentrate inside. Most marinas will have electricity at this time, but no running water yet. No problem; washing and waxing comes last.

All of your electronic contacts need a shot

of spray contact cleaner and a brass wire brushing. The labor now will save you from breaking the inlet and having your GPS or fish-finder take a dive in July. Pull the fuses and replace them with new ones. Yeah, that's a waste of a good fuse, but pulling the fuse makes you check the contacts for corrosion. Replacing them avoids the fuse that just falls apart in July. Also check the screw

connections at the blocks. They may be loose as well as corroded.

How are the seat and bunk cushions - ripped, mildewed or water-logged? Do the life jackets look like something you would trust your kids in or are you pushing the edge of the envelope? Think about buying some Stearns fishing vests to wear. When fishing alone, I always have on a vest. It may be a little dorky to some macho guys, but I would like to keep myself off the front page of *Newsday*.

Open the lockers and drawers and inspect what was left over the winter. Between fishing and beach parties, my lockers had an assortment of paper

plates, napkins, cups and flatware with which I wouldn't feed a dog. I also would find odd things like a planisphere from stargazing, spark plugs that didn't fit my engine, thread with a rusted needle, the spray head from my Sun Shower, an assortment of screwdrivers and screws, old tubes of silicon sealer and grease. Anything you didn't use last year gets tossed, other than safety equipment.

Safety equipment brings up flares and expiration dates. You should have parachutes, handheld and smoke, as well as an orange distress flag and whistle. Check the expiration dates and buy new; rotate the old to backup status. A fire extinguisher is another item that sits in a holder and is taken for granted until you need it. Think of replacing it and also adding

more. You should have one in the cabin, another at the helm and possibly a third near your engine, either inside the engine box on an I/O or inboard or in one of the transom boxes for an outboard.

What is the condition of the detachable stern lights? They need to be replaced because saltwater gets into the fittings. Steering is something people overlook until a cable seizes, the hydraulics leak or the engine pivots start to freeze up. Hydraulic lines need a look-over wherever possible to see if the rock and roll of the boat has them sawing and wearing on a cross-

member or bulkhead. Pop the deck hatches and check the fuel tank ground, fuel lines and the bilge pump connections. Do they look primo or are they showing signs of age? Give the outboard fuel primer bulb a look-over. It has been exposed to sun and salt for a while and may be breaking down. Maybe wire in a second bilge pump as long as the hatch is open. Also open the access port to the fuel fill pipe and check that to make sure the fill isn't worn, cracked or loose. On inboards, check the exhaust connections, engine belts, stuffing boxes, rudder connections and look over the head gaskets for oil leaks. Oil and fuel drips on a hot engine block are dynamite.

Fire up the bilge blowers and make sure that all electric connections are clean and tight with no warn insulation and no arcing. All hoses should have double stainless steel hose clamps on them. And all thru-hull water fittings should have a seacock. If not, take care of this now. Speaking of thru-hulls, what shape are they in? Is electrolysis getting to them? Are the seacocks moving freely or much too freely?

Pull the anchor and line out of its locker and check it. Your shackles may be shot or the eye-splices chafed. Check the line for rot, chafing, cuts and just plain wear. While it's out, was it long enough last season, was the anchor heavy enough? Or, if you didn't have enough scope, now is the time to buy another 150 feet and short splice them together. Do you want to add a second anchor for wreck fishing? Go around the boat and check the rub rails to see if they are loose and look for gouges and chips in the gel-coat that need some repair. Check particularly the bow and stern corners. Those are the places that get the most torture when docking throughout the year and will most likely need the most attention. Your boatyard should have the name of a glass man that can do the touch-ups for you.

Did you bounce your swim platform off a dock or float a few times? Go underneath and check the fastenings. Look at the cockpit setup. Last year were you tripping over rods and wished you had a stand-up rod rack or an arch? Could you cut fish comfortably or did your bass fall off the board all the time? Did the fold-up splash board really work or do you want to get some Starboard and make transom-mounted

splashboards?

In the end, if you take care of these things and check them all annually, you will have a boat that lasts a very long time and an event-free fishing season. As the English say, "At the end of the day", it's



Capt. Steve of the "Big M Express", Brooklyn with a brace of nice codfish.



Mick managed two mid-sized pollack on the "Big M. Hook". One of these on a jig in 150-feet of water and you are in for a long tussle.

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