

Preparing For Winter

by Paul W. Esterle

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Fold down any antennas and secure them. Some shrink-wrappers ask that any canvas be taken down before their arrival. At least one company I talked to, Mr. Shrinkwrap, will do it for you, but at a cost.

In some cases, a frame may be necessary to support part or all of the shrink-wrap, to keep it from sagging and allowing puddles of snow melt to collect, freeze, and provide a base for additional snow to collect in such quantities that it could split the film. It may also serve to break up unsupported spans of film into smaller sections and so prevent it from flapping itself to pieces. In some cases, netting or tape straps can be substituted for a rigid frame. Apply padding to any posts or projections that might puncture the film. Most installers will handle all this for you, but again, you may be able to save yourself some money by doing it yourself.

Removing the cover in the spring is simple. Cut it away, being careful not to scratch the gelcoat. Remove any tape, strapping or temporary frames. Don't just dump the film in a dumpster. Most marinas have special bins for the material to make sure it is recycled properly.

Winter Covers and Tarps

There are several good reasons to use a cover or tarp and frame instead of shrink-wrapping. If you plan to keep the boat indoors, for example, an inexpensive cover will suffice to keep the boat clean. If you will keep the boat for several years, the cost of a custom cover and frame can be amortized and cost less than annual shrink-wrapping. A properly designed frame can provide sufficient headroom and access to various parts of the deck to make winter repairs feasible. Finally, you may have an oddly configured boat that may make shrink-wrapping difficult and a precisely fitted cover more practical.

For every boat with a neatly fitted cover, I see a dozen using the old standby, a poly tarp. These tarps come in a wide range of sizes, colors, weights and prices. You used to be able to tell the quality of the tarp by the color, with blue being the lowest quality and silver or green being the best, but this has

changed and the color no longer signifies the quality. Probably the best gauge of quality now is the weight; the heavier the tarp, the better the material. Even the highest quality tarps are less expensive than any type of sewn cover.

The tarp must be longer than the boat to provide enough material to wrap around the bow and stern and tuck into place. Tarps have regularly spaced grommets for tying down, but if you need to tie off at locations where there are no grommets, you can add grommets or use special tarp tie-down fittings, both of which will probably be available where you bought the tarp.

Tarps are much harder to tie down and are more subject to flapping in the wind than other types of covers. Spend the extra time and the extra line to get your tarp tied down securely, and don't expect the tie-downs to remain tight all winter. Check them regularly; if you don't, you risk the cover's shredding prematurely or the loose lines scuffing your gelcoat.

Never tie the tarp or cover to boat stands! The constant motion of the tarp and lines from the wind can work the stands loose, allowing the boat to topple, ruining your whole boating experience, not to mention your neighbor's. Be sure that opposite boat stands are chained together beneath the hull to keep them from "walking" out from under the boat.

Almost every tarp cover requires at least a simple frame to prevent low spots that could collect water or snow. See the following three projects for different approaches.

Wooden Tarp Frames: Wood, PVC, Conduit

One of the most important factors in a successful winter frame is the elimination of sharp corners or rough spots on the frame or the boat. Any of these will ruin a cover or tarp in no time. Pad sharp corners with carpet scraps well fastened in place.

If you plan to reuse your frame next year, mark each piece clearly and make a sketch or diagram for the frame so you know where each piece goes. Depend on your memory and you'll be standing among a bunch of parts wondering where they go.

At one time, almost all frames were made of wood. Some of these frames were works of wood-

working art, intricately shaped and assembled with precision. These frames were knocked down and stored each spring for use in the next fall haul-out. Other wood frames were cobbled together from furring strips and common lumber and were often discarded at the end of a season.

The boat owner now has several different choices for frame material and some unique frame parts available. White PVC tubing has been used for frames many times. Individual lengths of tubing are bent into arches and fastened to stanchions with hose clamps, duct tape or large wire ties.

Other lengths of tubing can be run fore and aft to act as rafters and ridgepoles. Fasten these on the inside of the frame to make pulling the cover over the boat much easier. The individual PVC arches may need to be supported in the middle if you are expecting a heavy snow load.

Another option for frame material is electrical conduit or EMT. This tubing is available at any home improvement store, in ten-foot lengths and at a dirt-cheap price. It can be cut to length with a simple tubing cutter. Bending is also simple with an electrician's conduit bender. Split foam pipe insulation works well as padding on conduit as long as it's firmly taped in place.

Do As I Say...

Don't just cover up your boat and wait for spring. Check it regularly for loose ropes, slipped frames, and holes in the cover. Fix the problem before the cover or tarp is ruined and is letting the elements in. There is nothing like trying to horse a heavy cover or large tarp in place during a snowstorm with a -10 chill factor.

Case in point: I didn't check one of my boats for a four week period. During that time we had several rainstorms and a snowstorm. I got a call from a friend whose boat was stored next to mine saying I had a problem. When I checked, I found that part of the PVC frame had broken and allowed the tarp to sag down into the cockpit. Water and ice were collecting in the depression but, luckily, it was a new tarp and it held, keeping the water out of the boat. I should follow my own advice...



Nautical Trivia by Ginny Hauff



1. Did you know that Charlie Noble is an "it," not a "he"? A British merchant service captain, Charles Noble, is said to be responsible for the origin, about 1850, of this nickname for the galley smokestack. It seems that Captain Noble, discovering that the stack of his ship's galley was made of copper, ordered that it be kept bright. The ship's crew then started referring to the stack as the "Charley Noble."

2. Did you that Dungarees is the modern Sailor's work clothes? The term is not modern, however, but dates to the 18th century and comes from the Hindi word dungri, for a type of Indian cotton cloth.

3. Did you know that a coxswain was at first the swain (boy servant) in charge of the small cock or cockboat that was kept aboard for the ship's captain and which was used to row him to and from the ship? The term has been in use in England dating back to at least 1463. With the passing of time the coxswain became the helmsman of any boat, regardless of size.

4. Did you know that One superstition has it that any mariner who sees the ghost ship called the Flying Dutchman will die within the day. The tale of the Flying Dutchman trying to round the Cape of Good Hope against strong winds and never succeeding, then trying to make Cape Horn and failing there too, has been the most famous of maritime ghost stories for more 300 years. The cursed spectral ship sailing back and forth on its endless voyage, its ancient white-hair crew crying for help while hauling at her sail, inspired Samuel Taylor Coleridge to write his classic "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," to name but one famous literary work. The real Flying Dutchman is supposed to have set sail in 1660.

5. Did you know that Fathom is now a nautical unit of length equal to six feet; it was once defined by an act of Parliament as "the length of a man's arms around the object of his affections." The word derives from the Old English Faethm, which means "embracing arms."