

Head Hose Replacement

Paul Esterle has been building or repairing watercraft, of all descriptions, for longer than he cares to admit, from hovercraft to power and sailboats. Paul specializes in boat improvement and repair projects utilizing wood, epoxy, and fiberglass.

If you have any questions about your boat project, contact Paul at pesterle@comcast.net.

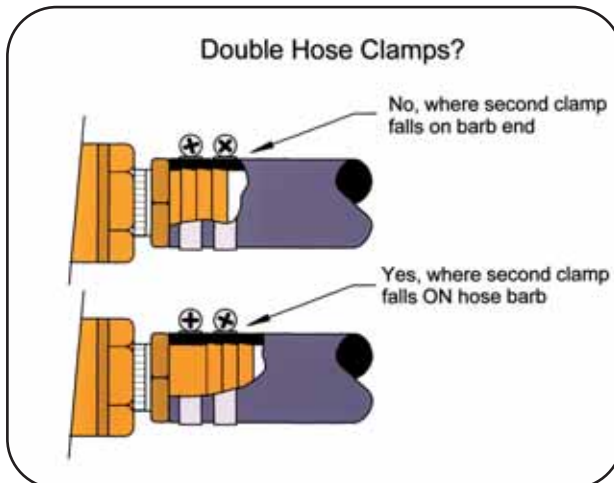
by Paul W. Esterle

What can I say about replacing head hoses but YUCK! That job is right up there near the top of my all-time least favorite boat job. My worst experience was when we purchased our 35-footer. We found out that she had sat in her slip for four years with a full holding tank. Unfortunately, we surveyed and purchased her during cold weather and didn't notice the smell. But let me tell you, when it warmed up - PHEW!

We ended up stripping the head down to the bare wall, cabinetry and all, and starting over. One of the problems we encountered was that the hoses, probably original to the boat, had bonded themselves to the hose barbs on the various parts of the plumbing system, making removal difficult.

Obviously, the first step in replacing the hoses is to thoroughly flush the system. Run fresh water through the head and into the holding tank several times. If you have the luxury of time, partially fill the holding tank and add some detergent. Take the boat out for a spin and let the water and detergent slosh around. This will help break up the solids in the bottom of the tank and in the hoses.

At this point, I have to relate a funny story I heard on one of the boating forums I subscribe to. The boater



in question had asked Peggy Hall about cleaning out his holding tank system. Peggy Hall is an acknowledged expert on marine sanitation systems. In fact, if you use K.O. in your head, she invented it. In any case, the boater followed Peggy's advice, flushed the system several times and then added detergent to the tank.

This is where the whole process went south. He forgot he had a Groco Sweet tank system installed in his holding tank. The nasty smells from your holding tank are due to the growth of anaerobic bacteria, the

kind that thrive in the absence of oxygen. It follows that adding oxygen to the tank will favor the growth of non-stinky aerobic bacteria. The Sweet Tank system works by bubbling air through the contents of the holding tank. You can see where this story is going. The hapless boater spent a great deal of time explaining the brown bubbles coming from his holding tank vent and cleaning up the resulting stains on his hull and dock.

In any case, with the tank and hoses flushed and emptied, it's time to start the hose removal process. I do one more thing before even starting the hose removal process. I pick up a couple of packages of adult Depends diapers and spread them around the areas where the hose will be removed from, on the head floor, in any compartments the head hose passes through and all around the holding tank. As careful as you might be, there is always that odd bit of residue to leak out. It goes without saying that you will be wearing latex gloves, eye protection and a mask, right?

As I mentioned at the start, in all likelihood the hose will be firmly bonded to the hose barbs. If you have bronze fittings, you can be a little more aggressive in the removal process, but many barbs and fit-

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things are plastic, old and possibly brittle. If you are replacing the hose, you aren't likely to be saving any of the old ones, so start by cutting the hose, along the length of the hose, just past the barb. You can then push a screwdriver blade into the cut and pry the hose loose from the barb. Some people use a pair of channel lock or water pump pliers to twist off the hose, but you risk collapsing the hose barb with this method. With the hose loose, you will immediately see the benefit of the diapers.

Before you throw the old hoses away, document their lengths so you can cut the new hoses to the right length the first time. The hoses often have to be snaked through a bulkhead or two and you don't want to be pulling the hoses in and out to get the right length, or worse, cutting a hose too short. Head hose, at least good head hose, is expensive and you don't want to buy more than you actually need.

With the old hoses out and the lengths documented, it's time to contemplate buying new hose. As I mentioned, good head hose is expensive. However, this is one area where expense shouldn't be a consideration. As nasty as this job can be, why use less than the best? You certainly don't want to do this job very often. Heck, you probably don't even want to do it this time.

Selecting the best hose is a moving target. For a long while, Sealand had the best hose. Recently, I've heard more and more folks using the Shields Poly-X

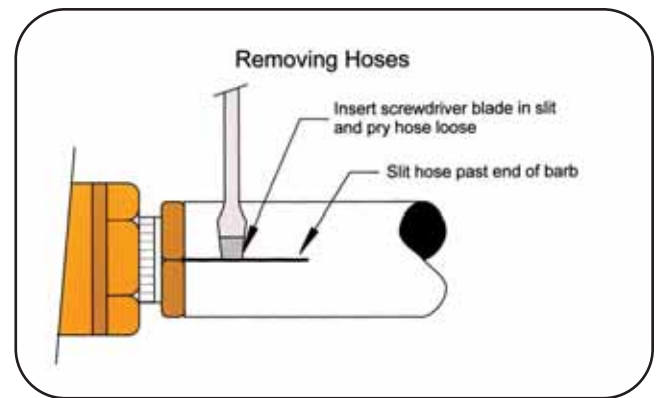
sanitation hose. Note that hose manufacturers usually have several different grades of sanitation hose at different price levels and they aren't all created equal. The Poly-X is currently going for a little less than \$20 a foot. (Did I mention that sanitation hose was expensive?)

Okay, you have the hose and it's cut to the right lengths. Did you remember hose clamps? Don't try to re-use the old ones; buy new. Make sure they are all stainless steel, including the screw. Some lower priced hose clamps have mild steel screws that will rust. Take a magnet along to check; real stainless steel is non-magnetic.

The first time you try to put the hose on the hose barb, you'll notice it's a little tough. In fact, if the hose goes on easily, it's probably the wrong size hose or barb. Two things aid getting the hose on the barb without breaking the barb: heat and lubricant. You can use a hair dryer to warm up the hose and make it a little more pliable. Be careful using a heat gun, however, since it can easily overheat and cook the hose.

There are two schools of thought on a lubricant for the end of the hose. Some folks use a bit a Dawn dishwashing detergent wiped inside the end of the hose. Others favor the use of K-Y Jelly. Some claim that the glycerin based K-Y will dry out and help form a sealing bond to the barb.

Once the hose is in place, it's time for the hose clamps. Many state that the hoses have to have double hose clamps. In fact, the only hoses aboard a boat that



are mandated to have double hose clamps are fuel hoses. Not that double clamps are a bad idea, but it does depend on the hose barb. If the barb is long enough to hold two hose clamps without one of them falling on the end of the barb, go ahead with two hose clamps. Don't use a second hose clamp if part of the clamp rides on the very end of the hose barb. This will eventually cut the end of the hose, that last thing you want in a head hose.

I've heard one more suggestion, from Peggy Hall, I think. That is to wrap the head hose in Saran Wrap. Use the actual wrap, not a generic. This is supposed to prevent odor permeation and thus prolong the life of your hose installation.

There you have it, my take on replacing your head hoses. Don't call me. I've already done mine and once is enough.

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