



### Smart Tips for Safer Winter Lay-up Afloat

Many New England boaters choose in-the-water winter storage during their lay-up period. “Lay-up” means the boat is winterized, decommissioned and not being used for any purpose. Following these smart tips will help to keep your boat damage free in the cold months. A bit of prevention in the fall, along with regular attention throughout the winter, will prevent many unnecessary headaches. As always, make sure to contact your insurance agent to discuss any necessary changes to your policy related to wet and winter storage.

- **Make regular inspection visits** to your vessel to ensure the bilges are dry, drains are clear, mooring lines are secure and not chafing, and batteries are charged. Post emergency phone numbers in one of the boat’s windows facing the dock. If you’ll be away for an extended period, arrange to have a friend or neighbor check on the boat.
- **Don’t let leaves, ice or snow accumulate** because it can block cockpit drains, and the weight of snow or rainwater collecting in the cockpit can force the stern down, allowing water to enter through openings normally above the waterline. Inspect all through-hulls close to the waterline. If any of them are plastic, they can develop cracks that will allow water in if they become submerged. They should be replaced with bronze or fiber-reinforced nylon.
- **Make certain bilge pumps and float switches are in good condition**, and keep the batteries charged. Remember, though, that pumps don’t sink boats. Leaks sink boats. Inspect all your hoses, valves, outdrive bellows, stuffing boxes, strainers and through-hulls and be sure everything is ship-shape. Be sure all hatches are secured, and all cockpit hatch drains are clear of debris and obstructions.
- **Close all the seacocks.** If they are left open, and a short period of freezing weather causes a hose to split or a strainer to crack, the boat will sink when the weather warms up. In fresh water where muskrats may be a problem, cover or block exhaust through-hulls. Be sure to inspect all the plumbing when opening the seacocks in the spring.
- **Install a smoke detector and a high water alarm.** If there’s a problem onboard, the alarm may be heard by a neighbor or a marina employee.
- Marinas are a target for thieves in the winter. **Be sure to remove all valuables** from your boat, including electronics, tools, binoculars, fishing gear and small outboard motors, and take them home or store them safely ashore.
- **Remove sails, including roller-furled headsails**, to prevent them from being damaged during a winter storm. Also, be sure all exterior canvas is well secured.
- If you must use heaters on board, **consider using non-thermostatic “hot sticks” or “air dryers,”** which are safer, use less electricity, and help fight mildew by keeping air moving. Leave interior lockers open to provide more air circulation.

Sources: Gowrie Group [www.gowrie.com](http://www.gowrie.com), and [ACE Recreational Marine Insurance](#)

Gowrie Group Yacht Lay-up Afloat. [www.gowrie.com](http://www.gowrie.com)