

# De-Winterizing Your Boat & Getting Ready for the Winter King Tournament

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With spring fast approaching and the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Homer Winter King Tournament around the corner, there are items to consider before you pull your boat away from that never-ending snow berm for the first time. These steps are a simple guideline to help improve your boating experience and, more importantly, keep you and your loved ones safe on the water.

## **Remove the cover**

Whether you had your boat professionally shrink-wrapped or tarped up yourself, take time to examine items for any moisture buildup, mold, and mildew. While a cover helps protect it from the elements, there are still areas that may need to be addressed and cleaned. Time to dump the dehumidifiers!

## **Battery care**

You may have removed your batteries or simply disconnected them. Whatever the case, it is important to ensure you have good, charged batteries. You can take them to a local auto parts store or call your dealer and have them load-tested. Be sure to clean off any corrosion on the posts or wire/cable ends. A wingnut is not recommended on terminals. Be sure to all ends are secured properly and tight with a nut. Finally, spraying corrosion inhibitors on the posts will prevent future corrosion issues.

## **Fuel**

Stabilizing fuel prior to putting the boat away is common practice. However, it's good to know your fuel level and its condition. Remember if it was topped off, fuel expands as ambient temperature increases. If your engine is carbureted, it may be worth draining the bowl(s) to get rid of old fuel before starting the engine. Modern fuel injection outboards have a Vapor Separator Tank (VST) that normally has a drain. Follow your owner's manual for how to access this. If your boat was winterized by a shop, these items may have been drained already, and all you need to do is prime it up. Be sure to inspect your primer bulb and fuel lines for cracks or stiffness. If you have onboard water separators, check their condition, and if water is present, drain as necessary. Your outboard may have its own internal water separators. Follow your owner's manual for inspection and draining.

## **Bilge pump**

The bilge area is often neglected but is home to one of the most important tools for your boat, the bilge pump. Often, during the harsh winters, this area can fill with water and freeze. Especially if you forgot to remove your drain plug. Be sure you take the time to thaw this area out and confirm the bilge pump works properly. Inspect for any corroded wiring or damaged floats. If you have an auto bilge, there may be a button to press directly on the bilge to test its operation.

## **Safety gear**

Contact your local USCG to determine what is required on your boat but be sure to have all your life jackets, flares, fire extinguishers, and throwables. Check to make sure you are up to date on all registrations. Test your VHF, chart plotter, and depth sounder for proper operation. Locate your fuse panel and make sure you have extras. Create a float plan if needed. For a handy checklist click on the link. [Boating-Equipment \(coastguardfoundation.org\)](http://coastguardfoundation.org)

### **Steering and controls**

What may have worked fine last year could be seized up after sitting for months. Check the operation of your steering, throttle, and shift cables. If your boat uses hydraulic steering be aware of any leaks and top off the helm with the proper fluid and confirm function. Many outboards now have drive-by-wire controls and may need to be test ran on the hose to confirm proper operation. Check pivot points of linkage for smooth operation.

### **Lubrication**

Refer to your owner's manual for all pivot points and grease fittings. Checking to make sure all moving parts operate freely as they should. Removing the cowling to the outboard and spraying a corrosion inhibitor on all necessary areas can be beneficial as well. Use the recommended marine grease for the application.

### **Anodes**

Many shops check these during regular service or winterization, but it is a good idea to inspect your anodes for corrosion. Keep in mind that many outboards have internal anodes that can be replaced. Refer to your owner's manuals. Excessive corrosion on anodes can result from stray current or boats around you. Contact your local marine electrician if there are concerns.

### **Scheduled Maintenance**

Whether you have a local shop take care of your outboard or are a DIY kind of person, it is important to make sure you are up to date on all scheduled maintenance. These items can include engine oil and filter, lower unit oil, fuel filters, spark plugs, thermostats, water pump, timing/accessory belt, etc. Contact your local dealer or refer to your owner's manual for your maintenance schedule.

### **Trailing**

You may need to tow your boat to the nearest fishing spot. Good trailer maintenance and inspection can save you from a much bigger headache down the road. Check your wheel bearings, grease as necessary or inspect the level of oil in the hub. Be sure your lights work properly. Do a visual inspection of your tires for cracks or tread wear. Keep an eye out for any structural damage on the frame, axles, or suspension. Check the condition and operation of your winch and trailer jack. Make sure you have safety tie-down straps for traveling. Refer to your owner's manual for transporting the outboard while on a trailer.

### **Spare parts and tools**

Many boaters feel more comfortable on the water with spare parts for their outboard or boat with tools to help perform the job. Having items such as a spare water separator, fuel filters, spark plugs, oil, and a

propeller are common items to have extra of. If this is you, be sure to have the necessary tools and knowledge to do the job.

### **Auxiliary Motor**

Let's not neglect your kicker. Not only do you want to make sure you can successfully troll for that winning fish, but all too often the little engine that could has been neglected. Be sure you have fresh fuel and check all the fluids. Perform maintenance as needed and start the engine before you head out. Make sure it runs smoothly, goes in and out of gear and pumps water. This can be what gets you home in the case of an emergency.

### **Sea Tow or towing service**

Check to see if your boat insurance offers towing and what the coverages may be. If you do not have insurance, you can contact a company like SEA TOW to make you feel safer on the water.

### **Launch Ramp**

Each harbor's launch ramp has its own set of rules and guidelines on how to load in and out properly. Be courteous and pay attention. If there are assigned spotters, be aware and wait your turn in line. Make sure your outboard is tilted up, whether you're backing down or coming out. **DON'T FORGET YOUR DRAIN PLUG.** Have your buoys out, bow lines ready, and lend a helping hand when needed. This can easily be the most stressful part of boating. Do your part to keep the process as smooth as possible.

### **Fishing gear and license**

Of course, you cannot go fishing without the proper gear. Make sure you have your fishing license and king stamp. Fresh line and bait are a must. You do not want the winning fish to snap off at the net because you were not prepared. And that perfectly brined pre-rigged herring won't do any good sitting at home in your freezer. Make sure that net is free of large holes or wear. Be sure to check ADFG for the most recent regulations of the area you intend on fishing. If your plan is to participate in the tournament, do not forget to register below!

[Registration \(homerwinterking.com\)](http://homerwinterking.com)

Wishing you calm seas and tight lines!