

Winterising Your Vessel

We know that you've probably already thought about caring for your boat during the harsh winter weather but each year the Scottish canals see at least a couple of boats sink because they haven't been adequately prepared. Here's a few tips that you might like to consider to help you protect your boat...

Inside the cabin

Ideally you should remove any soft furnishings and take them home for storage in a warm, dry environment. If it is not possible to remove items from the vessel then a small heater and a dehumidifier will do the same job. The dehumidifier should be set on a timer to operate for two hours a day and the heater should be set to run through a thermostat so it will activate if the temperature drops below 4°C. The best heater to use is a tubular greenhouse type as there are no moving parts and it will be designed for extended use with little chance of failure. For larger vessels, multiple heaters can be used and placed in different cabins to keep an even temperature through the entire accommodation.

Engine

The best protection for the engine is to change the oil and service the engine before storage, this way all the filters are clean, water has been removed and corrosive elements that build up inside the engine are washed away. As part of the service the strength of the engine antifreeze should be tested and topped up or discarded if less than fifty percent. The next step is to run an antifreeze solution through the raw water cooling circuit on the engine, this will prevent freezing and also prevent corrosion by preventing air reaching internal components on the engine. Once this is done the water pump impeller can be removed and the drive belts slacked to prevent setting over the winter. It is a good idea to place an oily rag in the exhaust outlet and to cover the air inlet to the engine, this stops the air moving through the engine and causing corrosion of the valve gear. Finally give the engine a good spray with WD-40 - paying particular attention to the electrical components and wiring - this will keep the damp away and prevent bad connections in the spring.

Plumbing

Any component that has fresh water in it *must* be protected from freezing and the damage that would cause. Sea cocks and, in particular, ball valves have a small void inside them which remains full of water even when closed - it is important that these valves are either emptied by opening and closing on land, or, a small amount of antifreeze solution is poured through the seacock while closing simultaneously to trap the solution in the valve and protect it. Domestic fresh water pumps should be disconnected and run dry to remove any traces of water. Water tanks and Calorifiers and pipe work should be emptied. Marine toilets should have antifreeze "sucked" through the inlet side of the toilet pump to ensure the entire pump and bowl are protected from freezing.

Electrical

Batteries should be fully charged and ideally left on a float charge from a purpose built marine battery charger; if this is not possible then check their charge every month and top up when required. Ensure the electrolyte level is correct and battery terminals are free from corrosion.