Despondent Dan Richter and his badly damaged 29-foot Seaswirl were tied up at the Mexican Navy base in Ensenada, Mexico, this past October when he spotted a mysterious man walking down the pier toward his boat. Dan wasn’t under arrest, at least not yet, but he certainly wasn’t free to go home either. And after a long night without sleep in a place where none of the people he’d been dealing with spoke English, Dan was almost begging to go home.

The man was about six feet tall, distinguished looking with white hair and a relaxed, personable manner. He continued walking toward Richter’s boat, stopping occasionally to exchange greetings with people on the pier he seemed to know. When he finally reached the boat, the mysterious man stopped, smiled broadly and said, “Hello, Dan, my name is Oscar. Your lawyer Jim sent me.”

Dan said he felt instantly relieved, if only because Oscar was friendly, spoke fluent English, and wasn’t wearing a uniform. But he didn’t have a clue who Oscar was and he’d never heard of a lawyer named Jim.

Who’s Oscar? (The Rest Of The Story)

The night before, Dan had been fishing off Mexico’s Isla Coronado, only a few miles south of San Diego, California. He and his 14-year-old son Brian had been

Continued on page 6
Somewhere A Mayday?

My name is Fred Gonzalez and I'm a firefighter in Southwest Florida. Our department just purchased a rescue boat and, unfortunately, we've been very busy. I thought it was great that you published an article outlining the steps and procedures to send out a mayday.

I personally don't think enough boaters know what they're supposed to do. We often pull up to vessels in distress in which the occupants were amazed at how many boats went by and neglected to offer assistance. Folks should know how to use their VHF to send out a mayday; it could be YOU out there someday.

Fred Gonzalez
Firefighter / Paramedic
for over 17 years
Bonita Springs, Florida

Electricity On The Hard

Regarding the Alert that mentioned using power on the hard: The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has a requirement that all boats receiving power while in storage must be protected with a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) source. This would also be a good practice for boats that require maintenance on the hard (a form of storage out of the water).

Also, I recommend that a grounding connection be made to the underwater metals of any boat on the hard using shore power. This connection has to be made to the facility grounding system, not just into a ground stake. I won't work on a boat's underside unless grounded, if shore power is connected.

Capt. David Rifkin (USN, Ret)
Jacksonville, Florida

Right Of Way?

In the October issue, I read the article about the collision between two sailboats. In that article, it was stated that there is no "right of way for boats."

Well, this is not true, according to Chapman's Piloting and Seamanship of Boating. It seems that while piloting your boat, there is an area that is called the Danger Zone. The Danger Zone around one's boat is located clockwise from dead ahead to two points (22.5 degrees) abaft the starboard beam. All boats in the area that are approaching your course have right of way. Boats outside this area approaching your course must give way to you.

This is something that should be known by any boat operator, especially if they have not taken any formal courses on boating rules of the road. Just like driving a car, there are rules to be followed.

Joseph Cassata
Massapequa, New York

The Danger Zone, taken from Chapman's, is a useful tool and skippers would do well to understand it as they navigate with other boats. But the COLREGS (Rules of the Road) do not mention "right of way" (they instead mention stand-on and give-way vessels), nor does the Danger Zone passage in Chapman's—and for good reason, since the term "right of way" tends to imply that if a skipper follows all the rules and is still involved in a collision, he would not be liable. And while that is true in most circumstances, there is the possibility that by following the rules ("I have right of way over that guy so I am not turning"), you put your boat and crew in danger. Rule 2, entitled "Responsibility," requires that every vessel must use all appropriate means to avoid immediate danger, even if it means violating the rules. This means that no vessel has the right of way over any other vessel if there is imminent danger of collision.

Can Dock Lines Sink A Boat?

I read with great interest (and sympathy) the article in Alert titled, "Can Dock Lines Sink A Boat?" (Seaworthy, Vol. 28, No. 4, October 2010).

The writer named two reasons—neglect and loose dock lines—that caused the sinking of that boat. We also learned the hard way—a ripped out deck cleat and boat-to-dock-contact—because of loose lines.

The secret is having the lines gently taut at all times, keeping the boat centered in its slip. We found that something called TideMinders [www.tideminders.com] appears to be the easiest way to accomplish this, regardless of high crosswinds, extreme tide changes, even neglect. We had a 12-foot-wide slip and a sailboat with a 10-foot beam. The TideMinders kept lateral movement to four
I removed the trailer from my hitch and we drove to a gas station and asked for a phone book. I had no idea where I was going to find anyone to help me move a loaded trailer with a broken axle on a Sunday. It just so happened that in the phone book there was a listing for “Towboat U.S.” I assumed in Anderson, which was the closest large town. I called and spoke to a person (it was either “Tom” or “Todd”), and identified myself as a BoatU.S. member. Although he was out of the office, he was able to reach a local towing company and get them to me in about two hours. We loaded the trailer and boat on a rollback tow truck and we had it in a secure storage yard in about 30 minutes.

Both the TowboatU.S. representative and the local towing company were extremely helpful. I was just amazed. The TowboatU.S. representative called us later to make sure we’d been helped. Very impressive! Please pass on our sincere compliments to your TowboatU.S. people.

Douglas M. Muller
Charleston, South Carolina

Solving Mildew Problems

I'm having trouble with mildew and thought you must have published some articles about it at one time, but I couldn't find anything about this in the archives.

Holly Anderson
Ventura, California

See page 8.

First, Birdies And Now, Spiders

My wife and I live on Greenwood Lake in West Milford, New Jersey. Shortly after the completion of our dock and sundeck, we acquired resident barn swallows in the overhang at the very end of the dock, closest to the water (four nests, four families). The swallows leave in the early fall, and families of starlings move in till spring, when the swallows return. Sort of like their own timeshare. I have a boat lift that is operated with pulleys and cables that run over the top of the boat, making a convenient perch for dozens of them to sit and stare at the lake.

Aside from staring, they also leave behind a row of reminders on the boat cover. I collected discarded CDs from my wife’s computer work and freebies in the mail. I glued two discs together so both sides had the shiny, reflective surface showing. I then used heavy nylon string and a staple gun to hang the discs from the rafters surrounding the boat. Perching and poop trail problem solved!

Next challenge: Can anyone tell me how to get rid of millions of spiders under all the rafters? Spider Away spray did not work.

JC Ringer
West Milford, New Jersey

Sunday In Honea Path

My wife and I were trailering my son's Boston Whaler from Clemson, South Carolina, (in the upstate) to Charleston on Sunday. While driving through Honea Path, the trailer’s axle fractured. Honea Path is not exactly a metropolis, and we were at least 20 miles away from any large town.
Don’t Rely On Your Bilge Pump To Protect The Boat

In spring, summer, and fall, you shouldn’t rely on your bilge pump to protect the boat from chronic leaks. In winter, you can’t rely on a bilge pump; it’s probably frozen into a block of ice. The only way to assure your boat’s continued good health is by visiting it periodically or, better yet, have your boat hauled and fix the chronic leaks.

Thinking About Moving Your Boat Overland?

A member in New Jersey contracted with a transport company to bring his boat back from Florida. While en route, the top of the boat was damaged (Claim #1010106) when the truck pulled under the portico at a Best Western hotel. The trucking company acknowledged their responsibility for the accident but never paid for the damage. There have been several other BoatUS members who have reported similar encounters with trucking companies that refused to pay for damage that was clearly their fault. (BoatUS paid for the damage less the deductible and is pursuing the trucking company. If successful, the member’s deductible will be refunded.)

All of the boat owners had hired trucking companies at uShip.com, an auction-style website. While the site may be convenient, it does not validate the various companies’ claims about experience, insurance coverage, and licensure. That is up to you, the consumer.

Several suggestions to members contemplating hiring a professional to move boats overland: Before doing business with any interstate transportation service provider (TSP), ask for a copy of the company’s operating authority documentation issued by the U.S. Dept. of Transportation or comparable state and local documents for intrastate carriers. This assures you that the drivers have commercial driver’s licenses, which include testing requirements for drugs and alcohol. Ask also for proof of liability and cargo insurance. The latter may not be sufficient to cover the value of your boat; you may need a rider to cover the difference between the cargo insurance coverage and the actual cash value of your boat. Any reluctance by a trucker to provide this information is reason enough to look elsewhere. To learn more about how to hire a trucking company, contact BoatUS Consumer Protection: consumerprotection@BoatUS.com.

Corrosion In Oil Coolers And Heat Exchangers

When replacing anodes, most people know that metal parts submerged in seawater need protection from galvanic corrosion. Less obvious are the metal parts within the boat that are also exposed to seawater. The latter includes engines oil coolers and heat exchangers (note that not all engines have these). Heat exchangers that cool the coolant in engines and oil coolers that cool the oil in engines and transmissions work the same way: The hot oil or coolant circulates through a canister filled with a separate bundle of copper tubes that circulate cool raw-water from outside the boat; the raw water then carries off the heat conducted through the copper tubes, thereby cooling the oil or coolant. The internal copper tubes can be inspected and cleaned on some units by unscrewing the end caps, exposing the copper tubes. The copper tubes can be inspected and cleaned by removing the end caps of some canisters, such as in the photo shown here.

While copper conducts heat very well, it is also highly susceptible to galvanic corrosion and must be protected with an anode; otherwise, corrosion can eat a hole in the copper tube and allow the oil or coolant to escape into the raw-water jacket and out the boat. The results can be an overheated engine or transmission with possible internal damage. (This sort of damage, the result of normal wear and tear, is not covered by insurance.) In other cases, brass nuts have corroded away, allowing water to flood inside the boat. Most (not all) heat exchangers and oil coolers are provided with a pencil anode that screws into the raw-water jacket (looks like a brass plug). An anode that is more than 50-percent wasted should be replaced.

Ice in the bilge is also why batteries are vulnerable in the winter. The normal accumulation of bilge water freezes and expands, which shoves the float switch up slightly, enough to kick on the bilge pump. The float switch is locked into the ice and the pump stays on until the battery is drained.
Backward Battery Goofs

Many owners of smaller boats remove the battery from their boat over the winter. The battery can then be left on a trickle charger in the garage, where it will not run the risk of draining completely, which can damage it, especially if it freezes. In spite of the weight of a battery, it’s not hard to remove and install, but there is one very important thing to remember: Always install the red lead on the positive terminal and the black one on the negative. Reversing the leads can instantly damage sensitive electronics or cause much more damage as in Claim #1002976: The owner installed his battery backwards with no apparent signs of problems—until the shore power and battery charger was plugged in. Within five minutes, smoke was pouring out the engine vents. The boat was a total loss.

Leaks, Part I - “Sinking” Ashore

Storing boats ashore is safer than leaving a boat in the water, but a boat ashore can still be vulnerable to “sinking.” This 27-foot boat was being stored ashore in New York this past winter, which was a particularly wet one in the Mid Atlantic and Northeast. When spring arrived, the owner finally went to the boat and discovered leaves had accumulated in the cockpit drains, causing the pile of melting snow to flow into the cabin. The leaves also clogged the boat’s drain plug and water had risen in the cabin to the engine (Claim #1002319).

This winter, make it a point to visit your boat frequently. Aside from clogged cockpit drains, check for pooling water, sagging covers, and shifted jack stands (don’t try moving them yourself). If possible, go aboard and open up hatches and ports to let air circulate for a while.

Leaks, Part II - Deck Damage

Aside from blocked scuppers, precipitation can also find its way below via leaks at ports and deck fittings. More often than not, however, the leaking water finds its way into the deck’s core, which is typically balsa, plywood, or foam. Once that happens, delamination is almost inevitable and the structure will lose much of its strength. The area around the fitting will sound soft if tapped with a small hammer and it may even feel spongy underfoot. Repairs can involve cutting out sections of deck, installing new core, and the glassing it back over. It’s a job that’s well beyond the abilities of the average handyman.

Preventing delamination, however, is a handyman’s job: Re-bed the deck hardware every few years. You’ll have to pull up the fitting, clean out all of the old caulk, and then lay down new caulk. It’s messy, but doable. Going one step further insures that even if there is a leak, it won’t ruin the core: Drill out the holes in the deck by about an extra 1/8-inch and fill them with epoxy (use modeling clay underneath to keep the epoxy from running out). After the epoxy sets, re-drill the hole for the fasteners and seal — the core will now be waterproofed. Another tip: First, tighten the fasteners until they are barely snug and let the caulk set. Then tighten all the way — this way, the sealant won’t merely get pushed out.

The picture (Claim #1003481) illustrates how not to reseal a stanchion base. Globbing sealant around a fitting may stop a leak briefly, but water is guaranteed to return.
Seaworthy
January 2011

Getting Caught in Tuna Pens

Finding yourself caught in a fish net or holding pen can be expensive anywhere. In this case, the Mexican Navy freed Dan Richter’s trapped boat, but the cost for being freed by a private towing company is considered salvage and can cost several thousand dollars. Add to that the cost to repair the net as well your boat’s props, shaft, etc., and the final tab for your navigation error could be tens of thousands of dollars. These costs are normally covered by your BoatU.S. insurance policy.

There is yet another cost that apparently has been levied by Mexican authorities in the past: traumatizing the tuna. Todd Schwede, a marine surveyor in San Diego, says the pen owner’s claim is that the tuna are traumatized and as a result won’t sell as well on the open market. A single bluefin tuna was recently sold in Japan for over $100,000.

Schwede, who makes no claims to being an expert on fish psychology, says he’s heard of other claims for traumatizing tuna that were as high as $80,000. He has no idea whether the fines were paid, however; unlike damage repair costs, fines are not covered by an insurance policy.

Meanwhile, the Coast Guard arrived and sent over an inflatable with five crew aboard, two of whom climbed onto Richter’s boat. One of the Mexican Naval officers said they didn’t want money, they only wanted to help. The man who owned the tuna pens, however, showed up and did want money. A Mexican Naval officer in scuba gear dove under the Seaswirl and, with the help of the patrol vessel, pulled the badly damaged boat out of the pen. It turns out that the same officer later told Brian that the accident wasn’t his father’s fault and gave him his contact information, just in case his father was charged for the damage.

At this point, Dan said he was becoming optimistic. The Mexican Navy and the U.S. Coast Guard had been talking back and forth, and Dan thought his boat was about to be towed back to San Diego by the Coast Guard, but, for whatever reason, one of the Mexican Naval officers announced that they were going to tow Richter’s boat to Ensenada. Because they were in Mexican waters, the Coast Guard had to leave, albeit reluctantly. Dan opted to stay with his boat. At his request, the Coast Guard took young Brian home, but not before the young man fired off a few instructions in perfect Spanish about how his father was to be treated.

Young Brian’s role would prove to be pivotal in his father’s eventual release, but there would also be others. The rest of the story involves a long list of concerned people, none of whom had ever met Dan.

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Richter’s boat was badly damaged with one hanging precariously by its hydraulic cables.

Once he’d secured the dangling outdrive to the boat, Dan used the VHF to call the U.S. Coast Guard, which promptly dispatched a patrol boat and helicopter. Very quickly, maybe a half-hour after the initial call, the Coast Guard hailed him to say the rescue vessel was getting close and request that he shoot off a flare to mark his location. Dan complied. Seconds later, he watched a set of nav lights approaching, which, much to his surprise, turned out to be a Mexican Naval Patrol boat. Dan immediately called the Coast Guard.

The next few minutes were, in his words, “scary and chaotic.” While he was on the VHF telling the Coast Guard about his predicament, his son overheard the men on Mexican Naval Patrol boat talking in Spanish about getting money from his dad. One of the men stepped aboard, grabbed the mic, and told Dan to switch to Channel 11. Dan learned later that collisions with tuna pens typically resulted in large, even enormous fines, but what nobody had counted on was that young Brian, whose mother was born in Mexico, spoke perfect Spanish.

Brian began telling the men that what they were trying to do was illegal — “This is dirty money and you know it! That pen wasn’t marked. I have an uncle who works for the Mexican Border Patrol and he’s going to hear about this.”

Meanwhile, the Coast Guard arrived and sent over an inflatable with five crew aboard, two of whom climbed onto Richter’s boat. One of the Mexican Naval officers said they didn’t want money, they only wanted to help. The man who owned the tuna pens, however, showed up and did want money. A Mexican Naval officer in scuba gear dove under the Seaswirl and, with the help of the patrol vessel, pulled the badly damaged boat out of the pen. It turns out that the same officer later told Brian that the accident wasn’t his father’s fault and gave him his contact information, just in case his father was charged for the damage.

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Richter but none the less were eager to help.

The first was David Walker, a towing dispatcher at Vessel Assist in San Diego, who made a phone call to Fred Ventura, an emergency dispatcher at BoatU.S. headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia. Because BoatU.S. Vessel Assist has a very tall VHF tower, Walker had been relaying the VHF exchanges between Dan and the Coast Guard. As soon as he heard Dan and his boat were going to Ensenada (“It made me mad”), he checked the computer and saw that Dan was insured with BoatU.S. Later that same night, at about 3 a.m., Ventura opened a claim for Dan and forwarded it to the BoatU.S. Claims Department. The following morning, Kerry McCook, a claims adjuster for BoatU.S., called an attorney in San Diego, James Alcantara (the aforementioned “Jim”), and asked him to do whatever he could to help Richter. Jim called a colleague in San Diego, Carla Ishno, an attorney who is licensed in both the United States and Mexico. Ishno called the director of tourism in Ensenada, who happened to be her uncle Oscar!

The Plot Thickens

Dan may have been in Ensenada, but he certainly wasn’t there as a fun-loving tourist. Still, he appreciated Oscar’s visit (“a very likeable guy”) and was willing to go along with a perfect stranger “just to get out of there.” Oscar took Dan to the port master who, it turns out, had already heard from the owner of the tuna pens. Oscar and the port master started talking back and forth in Spanish. Dan listened, or at least tried to. Oscar then turned to Dan and said, “I don’t know what your son said to those guys but [the man who owns the tuna pen] wants to make a deal: If you won’t press charges against him, he won’t press charges against you ... just sign this paper.”

Dan was surprised, but he wasn’t signing anything without talking to Jim, his new best friend and lawyer. Oscar read the paper and then used his cell phone to read it to Jim. (This was when Dan learned that Jim had been hired by BoatU.S.) The port master looked it over. They were surprised (Jim used the word “shocked”) that the owner of the tuna pen had offered to make a deal that didn’t involve Dan paying him huge sums of money. Finally, with Jim’s blessing, Dan signed the paper and was told by the port master that he was free to leave.

Things were looking up, but the story wasn’t quite over; Dan and his mangled boat had to somehow get back to San Diego. A man named Gerard, who “knows everybody in Mexico and can get things done,” suddenly appeared. It turned out that Gerard had been hired by Jim and wasted no time arranging for the damaged boat to be hauled at a marina and put on a trailer. He then drove Dan back to the border. Jim, meanwhile, got on the phone and arranged for Dan to come back across the border despite not having a passport. (Getting him through customs still took almost five hours, but that’s another story.) When he finally walked back into the United States, Dan was met by Jim, who had been waiting patiently. The two men smiled and shook hands; Dan said that Jim seemed genuinely happy to see him. Jim said he was genuinely happy to see Dan. Both men felt relieved.

Dan hadn’t slept for two days. Thankfully, that was about to change.

Epilogue

Dan Richter’s advice on what he would have done differently is simple: Don’t fish behind Coronado Island at night. He added that whenever you venture into foreign waters, it helps to have someone aboard who speaks the language; just about everyone who was interviewed for this story credits young Brian for helping to get his father released without having to pay a huge fine. Finally, Dan is quick to mention BoatU.S.’s role in helping to get the incident resolved quickly, “I can’t say enough about how well I was cared for. Everyone at BoatU.S. was truly outstanding.”

BoatUS Will Be Rewarding Policyholders For Staying Claims Free . . .

Say Goodbye to Your Deductible!

Starting in February, the next time your BoatUS Marine Insurance policy is renewed you could start saying goodbye to your deductible. If you haven’t had a claim in the past 12 months, the deductible will have been reduced by 25%, and it will keep dropping an additional 25% each year you remain claims free! Once it reaches $0—it stays that way as long as you maintain your ‘excellent’ claims record.

The Diminishing Deductible applies to each boat you insure with BoatUS; a claim on one boat will not apply to any other boats you insure in the program. And unlike other insurance companies, if you elect to change your deductible at any time, you don’t have to start over; the discount you’ve earned remains the same. The Diminishing Deductible is one more reason it pays to keep your coverage with with BoatU.S.—the Best Crew for Protecting You!

NOTE: The Diminishing Deductible feature does not apply to the Named Storm Deductible.
Getting Fresh Air Down Below

Boats Need More Than Water!

Mention a boat and the first element that springs to mind is water. Boats need water. But boats also need air, which is one of those things people tend to take for granted, since it’s always there and it’s free. But just because air is abundant doesn’t mean your boat is getting all it needs; a lack of fresh air on a boat can cause problems ranging from mold and mildew to sputtering engines. The following suggestions are to make sure your boat will always have as much air as it needs to remain healthy and run smoothly.

Eliminating Fungus

Some boaters seem to think that storing a boat out of the water in the winter will help to keep mold and mildew at bay (the term mildew refers to the fuzzy stuff you see that’s produced by mold—which is a fungus). That thinking usually lasts until they open up their boat in the spring and are greeted with (at best) a dank, musty smell or (at worst) an interior full of mildewy cushions, carpets, and headliners. Mold spreads by forming spores and every boat already has them — the key is to deny them what they want so they can’t grow.

Keep Water Out

Two things make the difference between a fresh interior and one that smells like a damp basement: air and moisture. Not enough of the former and too much of the latter causes mold and mildew, and it’s a lot easier to prevent mold and mildew than it is to stop its growth. Mold growth is accelerated by high humidity and, once formed, it can survive for years, even if conditions change. The U.S. Center for Disease Control says that mold growth is encouraged by warmth and humidity, but, as anyone who has waited too long to clean out their refrigerator can attest, mold can also thrive in cooler weather. Even in frigid climates, the interior of a boat can reach temperatures that will support mold when the sun shines on the hull and in the early days of spring.

All it takes is a single leak to start spores growing. Unfortunately, it’s hard to find a boat that’s not in a humid location and vulnerable to leaks. Rain leaking through hatches and portlights will make a boat’s interior a mold haven, so the first thing to do is find and seal its leaks. Portlights and windows are probably the number one leak spot on a boat, followed by loose stanchions. On sailboats, chainplates that penetrate the deck are a common problem area as are deck-stepped masts. Leaking deck hardware (cleats, rails, windlasses) is another common problem. More bad news: Water that’s leaking through the deck core can cause another kind of mold, the kind that causes deck coring to rot. Re-bedding portlights or deck hardware is the only way to stop them from leaking (see Alert, page 5) and needs to be done sooner rather than later. Clogged cockpit scuppers are another source of water ingress; if the drains clog with leaves or ice, water can back up and flow into the cabin. In places with large snow accumulations, portlights, hatches, stanchions, and other fittings that normally seem leak-free can begin to drip as snow slowly melts over several days—check them after a heavy snowfall. Keeping a cover on your boat helps keep the water out, but if it prevents air from getting in, you could still be faced with mold and mildew this spring.

Keep Air Moving

Mold loves a closed-up boat. Air trapped inside tends to hold moisture, which mold thrives on. Unattended boats generate moisture inside through condensation because water, air, and hull temperatures are always changing and at different rates. This process is accelerated in a humid climate. The solution is to exchange inside air for outside air, which greatly reduces the chance of mold forming. Dorades, louvers, vent plates, and other waterproof ventilation systems help with air circulation, but if there is no air movement around the boat, they won’t be effective and powered ventilation might be required. There are 12-volt vents for boats, but unless there is a constant supply of electricity, solar-powered vents are a better choice and can move a surprising amount of air. Some models have batteries and can run for 24 hours a day, using stored power to run at night. A good rule of thumb is to replace the air inside the boat every hour (as an example, a 30-foot boat contains about 800 cubic feet of air), and vents are typically rated by how much air they can move in an hour. Larger boats typically need two powered vents, one intake and one exhaust.

Replacing the cabin air won’t do any good for closed-up lockers, so keep them open where possible. Don’t forget to open covers over the bilge; more importantly, don’t forget that there may be an open cover on the sole — leave yourself a note on the cabin door so you or someone else doesn’t accidentally step into the bilge in the dark. Removing at least some of the contents of lockers over winter will help air circulate. Small 120-volt heated wands are available that warm the air in lockers and cause it to circulate, but they won’t be effective if the cabin air is not vented, and it’s often not possible (or legal) to get shore power to a boat in storage. If you’re able to use shore power, these heaters are safer than hanging an electric bulb in a locker since they can’t get too hot and aren’t prone to breaking if the boat is rocked. One thing you should never do is leave an unattended household heater on board; every year boats (and neighboring boats) catch fire from these heaters or their extension cords.

Another way of lowering humidity in a confined space is with chemical dehumidifiers, which use calcium chloride to absorb moisture and then direct it to

Shrink-wrapping is great for keeping water out of a boat, but it can also trap moisture inside. If your boat is shrink-wrapped, make sure there are adequate vents so air can circulate; a boat this size needs at least 8 or ten.
holding containers. These tubs and bags are safe and available at most marine stores. Depending on the amount of humidity, a couple of packets might last all winter—use more for a larger boat. They’re cheap and easy to put into lockers or other places where removing humidity is a problem.

Something you can do when you visit your boat this winter (see page 10) is to open it up on a sunny day and let fresh air in while you’re doing an inspection. Go have lunch and then come back and button things up again. Your boat will appreciate the blast of fresh air.

Over winter, many boats are shrink-wrapped, which can present problems for air circulation. Shrink-wrap is great for protecting a boat from snow, dirt, and sun, but it limits how much air can get below. Vents can be installed in the shrink-wrap and depending on the size of the boat, several may be required; there are also solar-powered vents designed specifically for shrink-wrap. If there are no security concerns, consider leaving the cabin doors open so air can better circulate.

Finally, take home bedding, mattresses, clothing, towels, and other items that can attract moisture since they can be ruined by mold.

**Engines Need Air Too**

*Getting air to the engine is far more important than preventing mildew: Whether you’ve got a tiny outboard or a roaring V-8, it needs air—clean air—and lots of it. A lack of air can cause gas engines to run poorly and produce excessive carbon monoxide, reduce power, and, in diesel engines, create smoke and soot.*

Ted Parsons, a boat owner who lives on Long Island, was puzzled. The performance of his 22-foot ski boat was suffering. So much so that he could barely pull a skier out of the water. The engine lacked power and felt sluggish. But when he brought the boat to a shop to have it checked, it worked fine.

When he revved the engine, it sounded just like it should. But when Ted took the boat back to the lake, it once again felt like it was running at half-power and nearly stalled at idle. As he was bobbing on the lake, he opened the engine cover (which seemed unusually difficult) to see if he could spot anything obvious, which suddenly made the engine run smoother. That puzzled him, but the fact that the hatch was hard to open while the engine was running was a clue. On a hunch, he took the boat for a spin on the lake with the cover opened and it felt transformed, with lots of smooth power. Poking around, he finally found the problem—both air intakes had nests in them that nearly cut off the flow of air, causing the engine to struggle. Once the vents were cleaned out, the boat ran like new again.

The story illustrates how important proper ventilation is to an engine. Air contains about 21 percent oxygen, and it’s the oxygen that mixes with gas or diesel and allows the fuel to combust. An engine uses far more air than fuel—about 10,000 times as much. If the amount of air is restricted in some way, the engine burns too rich (too much gas), which causes a lack of power, smoke, and carbon buildup inside. A rich mixture also burns cooler, which creates far more carbon monoxide (CO) than a normal engine. Bob Loeser, a well-respected marine accident investigator, performed a test on a twin-engine cruiser and found that by merely opening the engine hatch, CO was reduced by nearly 25 percent. Imagine the increase in this deadly gas if there is a severe restriction in the engine compartment’s intake system. Air restrictions also cause a loss of fuel economy. On boats that are equipped with air filters (many just have spark arrestors), replacing a clogged air filter on a carbureted engine can improve fuel economy around five percent and up to 15 percent if the filter is really clogged.

Many older engines are only equipped with backfire spark arrestors and don’t have filters—the thinking was that boats have little dirt for an engine to ingest. That assumption isn’t necessarily true as anyone who has seen the black dust from a V-belt can attest. Trailering a boat can bring lots of dust and dirt inside, too. Many sailboats and trawlers have their engines located under the sole, and dirt and sand from shoes can find its way into the engine. Abrasive dust that’s inhaled by an engine can damage its internals. Since gas engines are required by law to have flame arrestors, only special-made marine (not automotive) air filters with built-in spark arrestors can be used if you choose to install one. Proper marine filters are marked “SAE J1928” or “UL 1111” to indicate USCG approval.

Other places restrictions can occur: Check the vents or louvers that allow air into the engine space for obstructions. The hoses that attach to them can get deformed and restrict airflow to the engine, so inspect them, too. Often, when a larger, more powerful engine gets installed, the intake vents are not modified to increase airflow. In some cases, what seems like fuel starvation is being caused by restricted air to the engine. Black smoke from a diesel engine is a classic sign of air starvation. By opening the hatch, and watching for a change in smoke, you can determine whether or not the engine space is getting the air it needs. One more thing: It’s generally not a good idea to leave engine space exhaust fans on while cruising, since it tends to pull out more air than it brings in, making it even harder for the engine to inhale while underway.

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**Curing Mildew**

As mentioned, it’s easier to prevent mildew than it is to remove it, but what do you do if, despite your best efforts, mildew gets started in your boat’s cabin? Bleach is the universal mold killer and works well on hard, non-porous surfaces—it kills the growth and can remove the stains. But it’s less effective on wood and can be a disaster on fabric (never use bleach on a PFD as it can damage the fabric or flotation inside). If you choose to use bleach, make sure you do it with lots of ventilation and don’t mix it with other cleaners. Dilute it with three parts of water. Vinegar is less toxic and also kills mold, but before you use it on fabric, try it on a spot to see how it reacts. Mix three parts of white vinegar to two parts of water and sponge it onto affected surfaces; if you need something stronger, vinegar can be used full strength too. A half-cup of borax in a gallon of hot water is an effective cleaner and preventative for hard surfaces, too.
Coping With Winter


Claim #0918191: A BoatU.S. member who keeps his boat at a marina in Galesville, Maryland, had always been conscientious about visiting his boat regularly over the winter, but a heart attack left him stranded at home under doctor’s orders to take it easy.

Take it easy? How could he relax when his boat was buried under record ice and snow? He called a boating friend and asked if he would take a look at his boat the next time he went to the marina. A good thing he did. During the time the member was recuperating, his boat’s cockpit scuppers had become blocked and water was spilling—trickling might be a better word—down the companionway hatch whenever the temperature climbed above 32 degrees. His friend’s timely visit had averted much more serious damage.

Visiting your boat periodically is a must, especially in winter when freezing temperatures, snow, and ice can cause problems ranging from water stains on deck to burst hoses below the waterline. If you can’t visit your boat once or twice a month, consider using a “buddy system” with other boat owners to watch each other’s boats.

Where To Look:

When the Boat Is In The Water

- If your boat’s in the water, the first thing to do is check the waterline. Is there a change? Check dock lines at the boat and on the dock for security and chafe. Adjust the chafe guards if necessary (heavy hose or commercially made chafe guards will keep your lines from shredding during bad weather). Make sure your fenders are placed properly and check for any marks on the hull that might signal a problem. Fenders that are tied to lifelines can wander—it’s best to have them more firmly attached to the boat. Smaller boats can be caught under a dock at low tide and then sunk when the tide rises; make sure dock lines are tight enough to keep them off the dock, but loose enough to allow for the variations in water level.

- Check cockpit scuppers and drains for blockage. Boats are sunk each year because leaves or snow prevented water from draining.

- If you have an inboard/outboard, examine the bellows (flexible rubber connections that seal the outdrive and cables from the boat). Look for cracks between the folds and check for a trail of water from the bellows to the bilge.

- Inspect your bilge. No good ever comes from water in the bilge and any standing water means a leak; even a small leak can eventually sink a boat. Check the operation of the bilge pump and float switch. If you’re not sure if your bilge pump is coming on while you’re away, consider installing a bilge pump cycle counter.

- Pay special attention to your stuffing box; leaking stuffing boxes sink boats every year. A stuffing box should not drip at all when not in use.

- Ensure that all through-hulls are closed (with the exception of cockpit drains)—many a cracked or slipped hose has sunk a boat. While you’re checking, it’s not a bad idea to open and close each seacock a couple of times to keep them from seizing.

- Make sure your wheel or tiller is secured to prevent rudder damage from boat movement.

- If you leave your shore power plugged in, inspect shore power cords beginning at the dock pedestal and follow to the inlet on your boat — look for places where the cord may have gotten pinched between the boat and dock, which can signify internal damage and A clogged scupper (leaves, ice, and dirt) can allow water to pool and eventually spill over into the cabin. This boat sank after the weight of the water in the cockpit forced a through-hull fitting underwater, which caused water to back up into the boat (Claim #0902733).

- A cover can do more harm than good if it doesn’t fit well. This cover filled with snow and the weight could easily bend stanchions, or even force a boat down enough to sink it. A good cover has a frame underneath to support it, preventing rain, snow, and ice from collecting.

- A misplaced fender or chafed line can allow your boat to bang against the dock. Make sure lines are tight enough to prevent contact with the dock, but loose enough to allow for tides.
When The Boat Is Ashore

- If your boat’s stored ashore, check the jackstands, cradle, or trailer to make sure the boat hasn’t shifted. The boat should be level so that water drains properly and doesn’t cause stains or, worse, leaks down below. Verify that the stands are chained together under the boat with plywood under the jackstands to they won’t sink into the ground. If a jackstand has shifted, don’t try to adjust it yourself; contact marina personnel.

- Check scuppers and drains for blockage. Even boats stored ashore can “sink” when pooled water pours over the cockpit into the interior. If your boat’s on a trailer, make sure your hull drain plug is out so any water that finds its way below can drain.

- Examine your boat cover if you have one. Look for the beginning of tears, loose fittings, and chafe and make sure the wind hasn’t broken a tie-down line. Verify that covers aren’t allowing water to accumulate or inadvertently funneling water below—any cover that isn’t well supported will accumulate snow and water, which adds considerable weight to the boat. Covers should never be tied to jackstands and if you see one in the boatyard that is, contact the marina and let them know; strong winds can catch the cover and pull a jackstand out from the hull, sending the boat toppling. Tying water-filled one-gallon jugs to covers to keep them down is a good idea in places that are sheltered from wind, but is ineffective if the jugs leak and become lighter—and they can whip around and damage your boat. Don’t fill them all the way if your boat is in a frigid climate since expanding ice can crack them open.

- If you have a sailboat, a roller-furled jib creates significant windage and should be taken down when the boat is stored ashore. (Many marinas require that they be off the headstay.)

- Outriggers stored at a 45-degree angle are prone to bending in ice storms.

- Outriggers should be disassembled or, if that’s not possible, stored vertically.

- To prevent theft, check that all doors, companionways, and hatches are locked.

- When you step inside your boat, take a sniff. Does the boat smell moldy? There could be a portlight or hatch leak. Other smells, such as gasoline, propane, or vermin, need to be investigated right away. If you leave your 12-volt or AC electrical system on (the only things that should be on over winter are the bilge pump/high water alarm and smoke alarms along with a battery charger), sniff for any electrical odors. It’s possible that a circuit could be overloaded or shorted, or the battery is being overcharged—find the source.

- Check portlights and hatches for leaks and look for water stains. Sometimes water leaks appear at one place but begin at another—a leaking deck fitting can allow water to trickle into the bilge, so make sure that you fix what is really leaking. Better to take care of the problem now than have to delay your boating season with repairs next spring.

- Now is a good time to take sticky seacocks apart for servicing.

Engine Compartment

- Inspect battery terminals for corrosion and top off with distilled water (if you have conventional wet cells). If you have a multimeter, you can check the state of charge—12.6 volts is typically fully charged but can be as high as 13.8 if attached to a charger. A bilge pump needs a fully charged battery to work properly, but keep in mind dead batteries don’t sink boats—they’re just a symptom of a larger problem. If you are plugged in to shore power, make sure your battery charger is the kind that turns off when the battery is fully charged so it won’t get overcharged. Most automotive chargers don’t work that way—and they’re not ignition protected, which means they could spark a fire from a fuel leak.

- Look for swollen or cracked hoses, rusted or broken hose clamps, and chafed or melted wires. Give wire and hose connections a tug—better to have them come apart now than while you’re not around. Don’t forget to check the fittings for your generator, if you have one.

- Check hoses in the engine compartment and make sure they aren’t damaged. This boat nearly sank when a rodent chewed on the intake hose. Give hoses a tug—better to find a problem now then get a call from your neighbor’s.

- Check for any fuel, oil, or cooling-water leaks. You don’t want your bilge pump spewing oil into the water next spring or you could be in for a big fine.
Skipper Winter Refit
A Few Suggestions

When the boat is laid up for the winter, there are chores and upgrades that can be done, but how about an upgrade for the skipper? While there’s no end to what one can learn, here are some basic, vital skills that can be practiced and perfected while waiting patiently for spring.

For most of these basic skills, the information you need to know can be found in books such as Chapman Piloting and Seamanship and the U.S. Coast Guard Navigation Rules. If your boat is longer than 39 feet overall, you are required to have a copy of USCG Navigation Rules on board www.uscgboating.org/regulations/navigation_rules.aspx but it’s a useful reference source for any boater. In the meantime, why not use the downtime over winter to brush up on:

**Whistle Signals.** Remember last summer when the tug pushing that barge full of coal gave you a call on the VHF and said he would pass you “on two toots”? Uh-oh, were two toots starboard or port? Whistle signals are as much a part of being a safe mariner as not running aground. They’re a quick and precise means of one skipper telling any nearby boats and bridge tenders just what his intentions are.

**Navigation Lights.** With horn signals down pat, consider going over the rules for navigation lights as well. This is a bit more complex, because lights can tell you the size of the boat, its direction of travel, and, to a certain extent, its speed. You can learn if the boat is engaged in trawling, towing, perhaps minesweeping, or maybe it’s dead in the water. These are all important things to know, and could literally save your life late some night a few miles offshore with a containership’s lights clearing the horizon and seeming to be headed your way.

**Preventing Collisions.** Now that you’ve brushed up on your whistle signals and lights, make sure your understanding of the NAV Rules is thorough and complete. While some boaters simplify the rules for avoiding collisions to a single, tonnage-based rule (the bigger the boat, the more right of way it has), the complex reality of sharing the water with ferry boats, tugs, sportfishing boats, maybe a Panamax containership, and a sailboat barely doing five knots means everyone needs to know what is expected of them.

"With all of that information securely stowed in your mind, you will have a season’s head start on the lifelong learning that is part of the joy of being out on the water."

**VHF Channels.** Spin the channel selection on your VHF radio and there are, depending on your radio, as many as 58 VHF channels, but only a few of them are for everyday use. Learn the channels for recreational mariners and use the proper channel.

The owner’s manual that came with your radio will list the channels and their intended use. For recreational mariners, there are less than a dozen channels that you will need regularly.

**A Boating Course.** You can brush up on all of the above and more by taking a boating course. The BoatUS Foundation offers a non-proctored course and exam (www.boatus.org/onlinecourse) that has been approved by the National Association of Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) and is recognized by the U.S. Coast Guard as exceeding the minimum requirements for the National Recreational Boating Safety Program. The US Coast Guard Auxiliary and the Power Squadron also offer free courses to non-members.

**Six Basic Knots.** The definition of a good knot is that it has to be easy to tie and untie, and does the job for which it is intended with a minimal loss of rope strength. Despite what the old guy down the dock says, you need only master a few knots to take care of your crew and your boat. These are (with room for disagreement): the bowline, the square knot, the figure-eight knot, the clove hitch, the overhand knot, and the half-hitch. Without getting too deeply into the subject, all knots reduce the strength of the rope by 20 to 40 percent. Tie a proper knot and you minimize the loss of strength.

1. The bowline is probably the basic sailor’s knot. It can make a loop to attach the anchor or to get a crewmember back onboard. The bowline is the same knot as the sheet bend, used to attach two ropes. 2. The square knot is used to attach something to the rope. It is an overhand knot done twice, and is also called a reef knot, used by sailors to tie in a reefed sail. 3. The figure-eight knot is used as a “stopper knot” to prevent ropes from running through a block and are also used to tie two ropes together, with the joining rope following the course of the first knot. 4. The clove hitch is very useful for tying a rope onto a fixed object without putting slack in the rope. 5. The overhand knot is a basic knot, half of a square knot and is also used to join two ropes together, just like the figure-eight knot. 6. The half-hitch is a basic knot used as a “security knot” to tie off existing knots or as a simple, quick, and temporary attachment to a fixed object.

There is no shortage of books that can show you how to tie these knots. Two lengths of rope, two or three feet long, will suffice for practicing. Learn to tie these knots instinctively in the dark and you will be prepared for nearly anything on a boat involving lines.

With all of that information securely stowed in your mind, you will have a season’s head start on the lifelong learning that is part of the joy of being out on the water.
Avoiding “Blind Spot” Collisions

Given that there are no lanes, stoplights, speed bumps or signs to direct the helmsman, the need to keep a proper lookout is especially critical on the water. The sooner you see another boat, the sooner you can take the appropriate action to avoid a collision. Rule 5 of the Coast Guard’s Navigation Rules makes it clear that “every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper lookout by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions” as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision.

Everyone knows (or should know) to slow down at night or in a pea-soup fog. But the following three claims are examples of other ways that visibility can become restricted on a boat.

CLAIM #040278. COLLISION/INJURY: As on most sunny weekends in Florida, the Intracoastal Waterway was crowded. Most of the boats had throttled back, but Rated X according to witnesses, was up on plane heading south. The exact speed was not known, but it was probably well over 20 knots.

As the Rated X was passing a large 50-foot yacht, a small outboard with three fishermen aboard heading west, cut across the channel toward the same large yacht. Just as Rated X cleared the yacht’s bow, there was some yelling followed immediately by the sound of splintering fiberglass.

The skipper of Rated X had no idea what had happened until he looked astern and saw the bow of a small boat and two men in his prop wash. One of the men had severe injuries to both of his legs.

CLAIM #067134. COLLISION/INJURY: Shortly before the hydroplane races ended, the skipper started the engines and began heading away from the spectator fleet. There were 11 people on board, so when he pushed the throttle forward, the 32-foot boat struggled to come up on plane. Some adjustments on the trim tabs, however, brought the bow down and soon it was zipping along toward home.

Suddenly there was a loud bang and, according to the skipper’s account in the claim file, the boat lurched to port. A smaller boat that had been dead in the water was hit. Two people were seriously injured and both boats were badly damaged. The skipper said he never saw the other boat until after the accident.

CLAIM #952234. COLLISION/FATALITY: The two buddies had been out cruising in the ocean in their 20-foot ski boat when a strong offshore wind began kicking up heavy seas. The ride would be smoother, they reasoned, if they were closer to the shore. But even when they were near the beach, seas were still running about four feet. Because his trim tabs were inoperative, the skipper reported later he had been having trouble seeing over the raised bow.

The boat was doing over 20 knots when the skipper spotted a man who had been snorkeling. The man surfaced and was waving his arms frantically and yelling. The skipper reached for the throttle, but he was too late; his boat hit a second diver who died instantly. The skipper had not seen the raft displaying a “diver down” flag.

PREVENTION: Three seemingly different claims. But in all three cases—Rated X, the boat leaving the hydroplane races, and the boat near the beach—visibility was restricted but the vessels failed to slow down. Rated X’s skipper failed to take into account that the larger boat was creating a blind spot that hid the smaller outboard, which was about to cross its bow. A blind spot was also created by the guests on the boat leaving the hydroplane races that obscured the stalled boat. Finally, waves made it difficult to see the diver down flag and divers.

By failing to recognize that their visibility was restricted, each skipper had the false impression that his boat was alone and each was completely startled when the collisions occurred. None of the skippers took the obvious step to prevent a collision—slowing down.

Lessons

Especially in a narrow, crowded waterway, slow down and give yourself enough room to stop or alter course should a boat suddenly emerge from behind another boat. If a blind spot is being created by guests, they should be asked to move. The alternative—appointing someone to act as lookout—is not as effective, since he or she could easily become distracted by the other guests. Finally, whenever you approach an area where people are likely to be in the water, slow down to idle. Waves, even relatively small waves, inhibit visibility. Aside from slowing down, extra care must be taken to maintain a sharp lookout.
Louise Patten, the granddaughter of the Titanic’s second officer Charles Lightoller, went public with a family “secret” that shed new light on what happened after the famous ship struck and iceberg and sank off the coast of Newfoundland. Patten said that her grandfather’s public account at the official inquiry was altogether different than the one he told to his wife Sylvia. It had remained solely in the family and Patten said she decided to go public because she was the only one left who could set the record straight. It’s an interesting story and a good example of what not to do after a boat strikes a submerged object.

Lightoller told his wife that shortly before Titanic sank, the ship’s four senior officers had held a meeting in his cabin. First Officer Murdoch, who had been on the bridge when the ship struck the iceberg, told his fellow officers that the man at the helm had panicked and turned the ship to starboard instead of to port. The helmsman was used to the archaic Tiller Orders and Murdoch’s command was given in the more modern Rudder Orders. Even though the mistake was soon corrected, valuable seconds were lost and Murdoch felt it contributed to the severity of the collision with the iceberg.

The British newspaper The Daily Telegraph called the helmsman’s mistake “a straightforward error” that could be forgiven. The Telegraph said Patten’s second revelation was much more damning and involved a “deliberate decision”: Immediately after the collision, Bruce Ismay, the chairman of the White Star Line, which owned Titanic, persuaded Captain Smith to continue sailing while the crew ascertained the extent of the damage. Titanic plowed through the water at “slow ahead” for at least 10 minutes, greatly adding to the volume of water pouring into the hull.

Lightoller was the only senior officer at the meeting who survived. He told his wife that he had whitewashed his account at the inquiries to protect the White Star Line and its employees. He believed that if the ship had stopped immediately after the accident, it would have remained afloat until help arrived.

Dennis Metcalfe, the president of Nantucket Moorings on Nantucket Island, contacted Seaworthy this past fall to pass on some of what he’s learned about chafe protection. Metcalfe knows a thing or two about chafe; for 31 years he has been managing over 500 moorings.

For most of those 31 years, Metcalfe has had trouble sleeping whenever the wind blows hard from the northeast; the next morning, he might have to replace maybe 20 mooring pendants that were badly chafed. On a few occasions, lines have chafed completely through. Some had failed internally from heat. Others failed because the owners hadn’t properly secured the chafe guards or the lines had chafed against an anchor or bobstay. In his quest to reduce chafe, Metcalfe said they’ve tried PVC tubing, garden hose, leather, and Dacron sleeves. He’s used nylon and polyester lines, both three-strand and braid on braid. While some proved to be more durable than others, nothing could guarantee he’d get a good night’s sleep.

After many years of studying alternatives, Metcalfe read an MIT study that recommended using polyester line through the chock, which is where chafe occurs, and then using an eye-to-eye splice to secure it to a nylon line that runs down to the mooring ball. Polyester is tougher than nylon, but the nylon is still necessary to act as a shock absorber.

This gave Metcalfe an idea: Instead of using polyester, why not use Dyneema, the same stuff used for sheets and halyards on high-tech racing sailboats? (Dyneema wasn’t available when the MIT study was done.) The fibers have almost no stretch and Dyneema is much tougher than polyester. It’s so tough it’s used in bulletproof vests—you wouldn’t need chafe protection! He called Tom Peelen at New England Ropes and it wasn’t long before New England Ropes started making its Cyclone Mooring Pendants out of Dyneema. Metcalfe bought the first 20 and put them on boats. The following season there wasn’t a single failure, so he bought more of the new pendants. Nantucket Moorings is now in the process of converting all of its pendants to Dyneema.

There is a caveat to this almost-too-good-to-be-true story: Dyneema isn’t cheap. On the other hand, it’s the first truly bulletproof pendant—literally and figuratively—he’s ever used. Several northeasters have come through since he made the switch to Dyneema pendants and he has yet to have one fail or show any indication of chafe. Given the track record of other ropes he’s tried, Metcalfe says that’s truly remarkable.

From time to time, Seaworthy has written about clever techniques that marina owners have used to reduce hurricane damage: strapping down boats ashore; securing boats to floating docks with tall pilings; and moving boats to a better-protected hurricane hole farther inland. The latter was the plan for Dog River Marina in Mobile, Alabama, which hired professional captains to move its boats—mostly large sportfishermen—to a sheltered location up the Tenn-Tom Waterway (Seaworthy, July 2006).
The reason Dog River moved its boats rather than, say, strapping them down ashore is because the marina is only a foot or two above normal high tide. Sonny Middleton, who owns Dog River, says that the surge in past hurricanes has wreaked havoc with boats ashore, even when they were strapped down. He notes that during the most recent hurricane, Katrina, the marina office and West Marine store on the premise were destroyed.

The Turner Marine facility, which is directly adjacent to Dog River, is equally vulnerable to surge. Unlike Dog River, however, most of the boats at Turner Marine are slow-moving sailboats and trawlers, and there isn’t enough time to move them up the Tenn-Tom.

What to do? Turner Marine’s owners, Keith and Prince Turner, stepped outside the box — way outside the box: Since they couldn’t lower the surge, they spent a hefty sum to raise their marina. The 11-acre storage area is now over 10 feet above normal high tide. For additional assurance, they added riprap walls along the southern and eastern ends and bought a 50-ton travelift to compliment their 25-ton lift. In future storms, boats can be hauled out of the water faster and there will be a much greater likelihood that they’ll survive the surge.

If you’re looking for a winter project that will make your life better, probably much better, next spring, consider changing the discharge sanitation hoses at your boat’s head. Sanitation hose gradually absorbs discharge odors to produce that unmistakable time-to-change-the-hose smell. If you’re not sure, rub a rag along the discharge hose and sniff.

Swapping out sanitation hose is not for the squeamish. The job is slightly less unpleasant if it’s done in winter, when odors are less intense. Note, however, that bending thick-walled hose can be a challenge, especially when it’s colder. Placing the hose in boiling water may help to loosen it up but you’ll have to work quickly. An obvious corollary to all of this is that you don’t want to skimp on hose quality; the better the hose, the less often they’ll have to be changed.

As to which hose is considered “good,” several years ago, Practical Sailor did a test and recommended something called an OdorSafe hose as being clearly better than the others. It’s available at West Marine and comes with a lifetime warranty against odor permeation.

If your hoses don’t need changing, here are some suggestions to help keep them fresh-smelling for as long as possible: • Take a few extra seconds to flush waste completely through to the holding tank. • At the end of the day, close the seacock and pump fresh water through the discharge hose. • Empty the holding tank frequently. • Use only propylene glycol antifreeze (nontoxic) when you winterize the head. Alcohol-based antifreeze can deteriorate hose, causing it to be permeated by odors that much sooner.

One thing that sets the BoatU.S. course apart is that it goes beyond what you would expect in a basic course. For example, you might already know that most boats must have a fire extinguisher aboard, but if you have a larger vessel, the course will show you why it is wise to have more than the minimum requirements and understand what to do in the event of a fire on your boat. The course will not only tell you, for example, how many life jackets you need to have aboard, but also demonstrate in a short video how to fit a life jacket to a child so they won’t slip out. Upon completion of the course, you can also print your own certificate to provide your state’s boating agency as proof of boater education (for states that accept the course). In addition to the certificate, a few states require a small fee to issue a boating safety card or document. For $5, you can get a certificate suitable for framing.

BoatU.S. Marine Insurance has joined forces with the Association of Marina Industries (AMI) to host three presentations on hurricane preparation at AMI’s highly regarded International Marina and Boatyard Conference (IMBC) on January 26-28 in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. If you live along the Atlantic or Gulf coast, encourage your marina’s management to attend. Aside from speakers, there will be vendors with state-of-the-art products that have proven to reduce damage.

IMBC is not just about hurricanes; there will be many other topics and vendors of interest to marina managers. It’s a terrific conference. To learn more about IMBC, go to: www.marinaassociation.org/imbc or call 401-882-7334.

Rather than sitting around the house getting on your family’s nerves, consider taking a boating safety course this winter. The new BoatU.S. Foundation Online Learning Center at www.BoatUS.org offers a no-cost online boating safety course that makes learning easier and retention stronger with the use of animations, videos, and interactive activities. The course is great for boaters or anglers who need to take a boating safety course—it’s valid proof of boater education in over 30 states – and it’s also a great option for those wanting to brush up on important safety topics. It is designed so you can start, stop, and continue where you left off at any time. Some boating safety courses cost over $100, and in some parts of the country, it may be hard to find a classroom course near you or that fits your schedule. This free course makes sense.

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If you’re looking for a winter project that will make your life better, probably much better, next spring, consider changing the discharge sanitation hoses at your boat’s head. Sanitation hose gradually absorbs discharge odors to produce that unmistakable time-to-change-the-hose smell. If you’re not sure, rub a rag along the discharge hose and sniff.

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Whenever *Seaworthy* has written about docking techniques, the very first recommendation has always been to apply throttle *gently* when approaching a dock. The easy-does-it approach protects your boat’s hull and in extreme cases the dock. An “extreme” case is much more likely to occur when a boat comes into its slip really, really fast.

Consider the Labor Day Boat Docking Contest held each year for水men at Deal Island, Maryland. One after the other, watermen race up to the slip, swing the sterns of their (single-screw) boats around, and roar into the slip stern first. A mate then throws lines over the pilings and a guy with a stopwatch records the time. A good skipper can dock a boat, start to finish, in maybe 20 seconds. That’s really, really fast.

_Uh-oh!_

This past summer, one of the skippers miscalculated (with hundreds of spectators looking on), shoved the engine into reverse, and wound up busting a piling in half and wiping out the finger pier. It’s a safe bet that everyone watching who owned a boat had the same thought: *Hahahaha ... glad that wasn’t me!*

According to Doug Taylor, director of the Somerset County Roads Department, which also maintains the county’s waterways, officials are reevaluating whether conducting boat-docking contests at a public facility is a good idea.

Another example of what can happen when you approach a dock a little too quickly, this one involving the grain carrier *Grand Rodosi* in Port Lincoln, Australia: The 738-foot vessel was coming into its berth this past October when its engine reportedly failed. Fortunately, it didn’t hit the pier. Unfortunately, it plowed into the 154-foot *Apollo S*, a $25 million fishing vessel, which was moored at the pier. About 20 minutes after the collision, the *Apollo S* rolled over and sank.

Miraculously, no one was injured, but the *Grand Rodosi* is reportedly being held in Port Lincoln while attorneys “sort out some liability issues.”

_Docking Advice: Easy Does It_