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Professional Yacht Services & Maritime Solutions

Spring Dewinterization & Launch Guide

As winter retreats and sailing season approaches, properly dewinterizing your yacht is critical to ensuring safe, reliable performance on the water. This comprehensive guide walks you through the systematic process of bringing your vessel back to life after winter storage, from initial inspection through successful launch day.

> **IMPORTANT:** This guide assumes your vessel was properly winterized. If winterization was incomplete or questionable, consider having a marine surveyor inspect the yacht before proceeding. Document everything with photos and notes for insurance and maintenance records.

Expert boating advice for recreational and professional boat owners. 25+ years of maritime experience delivered to your inbox monthly.

Pre-Dewinterization Planning

Timing Your Launch

Begin dewinterization 3-4 weeks before your planned launch date. This provides adequate time to identify issues, order parts, and schedule professional services without rushing. Consider local water conditions, marina availability, and typical spring weather patterns in your region.

Week	Focus Area	Key Activities
1	Assessment & Exterior	Initial inspection, hull cleaning, hardware check, cover removal
2	Systems Recommissioning	Engine work, plumbing restoration, electrical systems, mechanical checks
3	Interior & Testing	Interior restoration, system tests, safety equipment verification
4	Final Prep & Launch	Bottom paint touch-up, rigging, sea trial preparation, launch day

Required Tools & Supplies

- Marine-grade antifreeze (proper type for your systems)
- Engine oil and filters (correct viscosity and type)
- Fuel stabilizer and fresh fuel
- Battery charger and multimeter
- Impeller replacement kit-most engine /generator places have "kits"
- Zincs (appropriate sizes for your vessel) ****replace when ½ gone, use a drop of lock-tite where applicable
- Hull cleaner, wax, and detailing supplies
- Basic hand tools, wrenches, screwdrivers
- Marine sealant and caulking materials
- Inspection camera or borescope

While **zinc excels in saltwater**, aluminum and magnesium anodes serve different niches. Aluminum anodes offer superior performance in brackish water and can also function effectively in both saltwater and freshwater, making them versatile for vessels that traverse varying salinity conditions.

Magnesium anodes, being the most electronegative of the three, provide the strongest protective current and are ideal for freshwater applications where zinc's lower driving voltage proves insufficient. However, magnesium's aggressive nature makes it **unsuitable for saltwater,** where it

Zinc plays a crucial role in marine environments as a sacrificial anode, protecting valuable metal components from galvanic corrosion. When dissimilar metals are immersed in seawater, zinc corrodes preferentially, sacrificing itself to preserve propeller shafts, through-hulls, and underwater hardware. These anodes must be replaced when deteriorated to half their original size

can corrode too rapidly and potentially cause overprotection, leading to paint blistering and coating damage.

Exterior Assessment & Preparation

1. **Initial Visual Inspection**
   Before touching anything, conduct a thorough walk-around inspection. Look for obvious damage from winter storms, animals, or storage mishaps. Check for sagging covers, standing water, ice damage, or any unusual conditions. Document everything with photographs, noting dates and conditions.

2. **Cover and Tarp Removal**
   On a dry, calm day, carefully remove winter covers and tarps. Inspect each cover for damage, clean according to manufacturer instructions, and store properly for next season. Remove any support structures, checking for pressure points or chafe marks on gelcoat or paint where supports contacted the hull.

3. **Hull Inspection**
   Examine the entire hull for blistering, cracks, stress fractures, or osmosis. Pay special attention to the waterline, through-hulls, rudder, and keel. Look for any gelcoat crazing or spider cracks that may have developed over winter. If you find concerning damage, consult a marine surveyor before proceeding.

4. **Hull Cleaning & Bottom Paint Assessment**
   Pressure wash the hull to remove winter grime and any biological growth. Use appropriate marine cleaners for your hull material. Inspect bottom paint for coverage, adhesion, and effectiveness. Note any areas needing touch-up or complete repainting.

5. **Deck Hardware & Fittings**
   Inspect all deck hardware including cleats, stanchions, railings, winches, and hatches. Check for loose fittings, corrosion, or stress cracks in mounting areas. Remove, clean, and lubricate all deck hardware. Test operation of all moving parts.

   CAUTION: Deck hardware failures under load can be catastrophic. If any fitting shows movement, corrosion, or cracking, rebedding or replacement is mandatory before launch.

Engine & Mechanical Systems

6. **Engine Compartment Inspection**
   Open engine compartments and check for obvious issues: standing water, oil or fuel leaks, rodent damage, loose wiring, or corrosion. Verify that drain plugs are installed (they should have been removed for winter). Check engine mounts for deterioration or movement.

7. **Oil and Filter Service**
   Change engine oil and filters even if changed during winterization (old oil can accumulate moisture over winter). Use manufacturer-specified oil grades. Check transmission fluid levels and condition. Inspect oil for water contamination, which appears as a milky appearance or separation.

8. **Cooling System Restoration**
   If antifreeze was used in the raw water system, flush it completely before engine start-up. Replace the raw water impeller as standard practice (impellers can take a set during storage and fail quickly). Check all cooling system hoses for cracks, bulges, or deterioration. Tighten all hose clamps.

   CRITICAL: Never run an engine with antifreeze in the cooling system. Flush thoroughly with fresh water before attempting to start.

9. **Fuel System Checks**
   Inspect fuel lines for cracks or deterioration. Check fuel filters and replace if necessary. If the tank was left partially full, consider adding fresh fuel and additional stabilizer. For diesel engines, check for algae growth or water contamination.

10. **Drive System & Running Gear**
    For inboard vessels, check shaft packing glands or stuffing boxes. Adjust if necessary to allow 1-2 drops per minute when shaft is turning. Inspect shaft zincs and replace if more than 50% deteriorated. For outboards and I/O drives, inspect trim tabs, outdrives, and lower units for damage.

11. **Propeller Inspection**
    Remove the propeller and inspect for damage, fishing line, or debris. Check the shaft taper and keyway for wear or corrosion. Inspect the prop for dings, bent blades, or cracks. Have damaged props professionally repaired or replaced. Apply anti-seize compound to the shaft before reinstalling.

Pro-Tip: Store the boat with service completed, better to store clean fluids rather then dirty water contaminated fluids during lay up. Also will help prevent launch delays due to schedule

Electrical Systems

Battery Inspection & Testing

Inspect batteries for corrosion, cracks, or bulging cases. Clean terminals and cable connections with a wire brush and baking soda solution. Test battery voltage (12.6V+ for fully charged 12V batteries). Load test batteries or have them professionally tested. Replace batteries more than 4-5 years old or showing weak performance.

Electrical Connection Inspection

Inspect all visible wiring for chafe, corrosion, or rodent damage. Check wire terminations and connections for tightness and corrosion. Test all breakers and fuses. Spray electrical connections with corrosion inhibitor. Verify bonding system continuity with a multimeter.

Electronics & Navigation Systems

Power up electronics one system at a time, checking for proper operation. Test GPS, chartplotter, radar, radios, and fish finders. Verify all connections are tight and corrosion-free. Update software and charts as needed.

Lighting Systems

Test all navigation lights, interior lights, anchor lights, and deck lighting. Replace any burnt bulbs with correct replacements (LED upgrades reduce power consumption). Check light fixture gaskets and replace if deteriorated.

Water Systems

Fresh Water System

Thoroughly flush antifreeze from all fresh water lines by running taps until clear water flows. Sanitize the fresh water system with a bleach solution (1/4 cup bleach per 15 gallons), let sit for 3-4 hours, then flush completely. Fill fresh water tanks and test all faucets, showers, and water pumps.

Water Heater

Remove the bypass if installed during winterization. Reconnect water heater to plumbing system. Fill the tank slowly, bleeding air from the system. Check all connections for leaks. Once filled, test the heater element or heat exchanger operation.
Pro Tip: If you operate the heater will antifreeze in it, the traste of anti-freaze will never go away

Head and Sanitation Systems

Flush antifreeze from all head systems. Lubricate head pump mechanisms per manufacturer specifications. Test toilet operation with fresh water. If you have a holding tank, flush it thoroughly and test the macerator or deck pump-out fitting.
Pro Tip:Check Y-Valve to ensure compliance in your area.

Bilge Pumps & Systems

Test all bilge pumps (automatic and manual) for proper operation. Clean bilge pump screens and check discharge through-hulls. Verify float switches trigger automatic pumps correctly. Clean bilges thoroughly, removing any oil, debris, or standing water.

Shower Sump

Clean filter if applicable and test,

Through-Hull Fittings

Exercise all seacocks and through-hull valves multiple times to ensure smooth operation. If any valve is stiff or frozen, service it before launch. Replace any questionable seacocks (bronze seacocks older than 15-20 years should be considered for replacement).

CRITICAL SAFETY ITEM: Failed through-hull fittings and seacocks are a leading cause of vessel sinkings. Any questionable fitting must be replaced before launching.

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Safety Equipment & Compliance

Verify all required safety equipment is aboard, current, and in working condition:

- **Life Jackets:** Inspect for tears, broken straps, or missing hardware. Test inflatable PFDs and rearm CO2 cartridges if needed. Ensure you have appropriate sizes for all passengers.
- **Fire Extinguishers:** Verify pressure gauges read in green zone. Check for damage or corrosion. Confirm Coast Guard approval tags are present and legible. Replace any expired units.
- **Flares:** Check expiration dates and replace expired pyrotechnics. Verify you have required minimum quantities. Store in waterproof, accessible location.
- **First Aid Kit:** Replenish used supplies. Check medication expiration dates. Update kit based on cruising plans and crew medical needs.
- **Sound Signals:** Test air horns and ensure backup whistle is accessible. Replace aerosol horns older than 3-4 years.
- **Navigation Lights:** Verify all required navigation lights work properly. Carry spare bulbs. Test anchor light operation.
- **VHF Radio:** Test VHF operation and confirm DSC registration is current. Verify handheld backup radio is charged and functional.
- **EPIRB/PLB:** Test battery level and verify registration is current. Check mounting bracket and activation mechanism.
- **Throwable Flotation:** Inspect cushion or ring buoy for serviceability. Ensure it's readily accessible and not stowed where it can't be quickly thrown.
- **Documentation:** Verify vessel registration is current. Ensure insurance documents are aboard. Update emergency contact information.

REGULATORY COMPLIANCE: Requirements vary by vessel size, type, and operating area. Verify your specific requirements with the Coast Guard or your local maritime authority. Offshore vessels require additional safety equipment including life rafts, EPIRBs, and offshore flares.

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Launch Day Procedures

Pre-Launch Checklist

- All through-hull seacocks properly positioned for operation
- All drain plugs installed and tight
- Batteries connected and switches on
- Fenders and dock lines prepared and positioned
- Propeller clear of lines or debris
- Engine oil and cooling water levels correct
- Fire extinguishers accessible and charged
- VHF radio tested and set to Channel 16
- Bilge pumps operational
- All loose gear and equipment secured

Immediate Post-Launch

Once in the water, immediately check bilges for any water intrusion beyond normal weepage. Start the engine and verify proper water flow from the cooling system exhaust. Check steering for proper operation. Verify electrical systems function normally. Monitor for any unusual sounds, vibrations, or performance issues.

Initial Sea Trial

Plan a short initial cruise in protected waters. Test all systems under actual operating conditions. Run engine through full RPM range. Test steering at various speeds. Deploy and retrieve anchor. Test all electronics and navigation equipment. Check bilges frequently during first few hours afloat.

> **PRO TIP:** Keep the first sea trial short (1-2 hours) and close to your marina. This allows you to return quickly if any issues develop and provides easy access to tools and support if needed.

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Common Issues & Troubleshooting

Problem	Possible Causes	Solutions
Engine won't start	Dead batteries, fuel issues, winterizing fluid still in system	Check battery voltage, verify fuel supply, ensure cooling system is flushed
Excessive bilge water	Through-hull leak, stuffing box adjustment needed, hose failure	Isolate source, tighten packing gland, inspect all through-hulls and hoses
Engine overheating	Failed impeller, clogged intake, thermostat failure	Replace impeller, clear intake screen, check thermostat operation
Batteries won't charge	Failed alternator, corroded connections, battery failure	Test alternator output, clean all connections, load test batteries
Water pump not priming	Air in lines, damaged pump diaphragm, clogged strainer	Bleed air from system, replace pump components, clean strainer

Professional Service Recommendations

While many DE winterization tasks are within the capabilities of experienced boat owners, certain services should be performed by qualified marine professionals:

- **Bottom Painting:** Professional application ensures proper surface preparation and coverage for maximum effectiveness
- **Rigging Inspection:** Certified riggers should inspect standing rigging every 5-7 years or after any incident
- **Engine Services:** Complex engine work, injector service, or turbocharger maintenance requires specialized knowledge
- **Electronics Installation:** Radar, AIS, and complex navigation system installations benefit from professional expertise
- **Through-Hull Replacement:** Below-waterline through-hull work should be done by experienced professionals
- **Survey & Inspection:** Pre-purchase surveys or insurance surveys require certified marine surveyors

Documentation & Record Keeping

Maintaining comprehensive records of all dewinterization work, repairs, and upgrades is essential for several reasons. Detailed documentation provides baseline data for future maintenance cycles, helps identify recurring issues, maintains warranty validity for major components, and significantly enhances vessel value for resale.

Your records should include dated photos of all major systems, receipts for parts and professional services, notes on any issues discovered and their resolutions, and copies of service records from marine professionals. Consider creating a vessel maintenance log that tracks hours of operation, fuel consumption, oil changes, and all service performed.

Preparing for the Season Ahead

With dewinterization complete and your vessel successfully launched, take time to plan your season. Review your cruising goals, whether that involves local day sailing, extended cruising to new destinations, or offshore passages. Ensure your skill level matches your ambitions, and consider additional training or professional delivery services for ambitious voyages beyond your experience level.. Stock the vessel with appropriate provisions, spare parts, and emergency equipment for your intended use. Create a passage planning system that accounts for weather windows, tidal conditions, and fuel/water requirements. Join or

Professional Yacht Delivery Services | Maritime Consulting | Route Planning

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consult with local cruising communities to learn about anchorages, marinas, and conditions in areas you plan to visit

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