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## How to Avoid Hull Damage and Extend the Life of Your Boat

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The hull is the backbone of your boat and the first contact surface with the water. The unkind saltwater, floating debris, and UV radiation are applied relentlessly. It is not only about how nice and clean your hull will look, but a clean hull also makes for some very important aspects concerning safe operation, performance, and longer life. Neglecting maintenance of the hull will lead to structural damage, leaks, and expensive repairs later on. Knowing how important it is forms the basis for being proactive about its care.

### Routine Inspection of Your Hull

Routine inspections are vital in finding those possible problems before they become so serious. After each use, inspect your hull for any cracks, blisters, or areas of wear and tear. Pay extra attention to high-impact areas: bow and stern, seams where the hull meets other parts. If your boat has a hatch, make sure it is sealed; water intrusion via the **boat hatch** can indirectly affect structural issues in the hull. The earlier you catch the problem, the less time and money it takes to rectify after periodic inspections.

### Cleaning to Prevent Fouling and Corrosion

A clean hull is a healthy hull. Given time, it will start to attract a nice collection of algae, barnacles, and mussels that attach themselves to your hull and increase drag while causing damage. The saltwater will also cause corrosion—mostly in your metal fittings. Clean off buildup with a soft-bristle brush and some marine-grade cleaning products. Cleaning should be done on a regular basis depending on usage. This is particularly true of saltwater boats, as a freshwater rinse after every use prevents salt deposits from building up in the first place.

### Selecting the Right Hull Paint

One of the best ways to protect your hull from marine growth, along with damage from UV, is anti-fouling paint. The special paint contains biocides that prevent barnacles and algae from settling on your vessel. Choose your paint depending on whether you are going to sail in saltwater, freshwater, or brackish conditions. Take the advice of your marine professional on what best suits your boat. Proper application of the hull paint every season adds to its performance and lower maintenance.

### Protecting Your Hull with Fenders and Bumpers

Most of the time, the docking and mooring process can scratch, ding, or abrade the hull of your boat. Good fenders and bumpers will protect your vessel against such damages. Use fenders on the sides of your vessel so they will act as cushions between your vessel and the jetties or other boats. Of course, keep these protective accessories under observation constantly for wear and tear and replace them if needs be. For the prices that fenders cost, it is well worth the investment compared to repairing hull damage from collisions that could have been prevented.

### **Prompt Repair of Cracks and Blisters**

Even small cracks or blisters in your hull can become big problems in short order if left unchecked. Cracks can compromise the structural integrity of your boat, and blisters can mean that water is getting in underneath the surface. Any deficiencies you find in your inspections, now's the time to make repairs using marine-grade epoxies or fiberglass repair kits. If the areas of concern are large it's best to seek a professional who can do the repairs correctly and safely.

### **Routine Maintenance of Seals and Fasteners**

These are the seals and fasteners around your hull that keep water out and all components securely in their places. Over time, those seals deteriorate and those fasteners loosen from vibration and exposure to the elements. Check all of the various seals for any deterioration including the ones around your hatches, for example, and replace if needed. Replace or tighten the fasteners accordingly to maintain your hull both watertight and structurally sound.

### **Winterizing Your Hull for Off-Season Storage**

If you are in an area that has cold winters it is necessary to properly winterize the hull to avoid any type of damage over the off-season. Give the hull a good clean and make sure it is very dry. Water seeping into cracks or blisters will expand if the temperatures freeze furthering the damage. Then protect the hull from snow, ice, and UV exposure with a protective wax or cover. This may also be a very good time to consider indoor storage or an extremely high-quality cover as a means of protection from weathering.

### **Long-Term Benefits with Good Care**

Time spent on your hull pays off over time. A well-maintained hull will give you better fuel economy, increased performance, and years on your boat's life. Plus, it maintains the resale value of your vessel for when the time comes that you would like to sell. Dedicating yourself to regular hull maintenance means safer and more dependable boating for many years.

It pays back not for cosmetic reasons but for the promise of safety, performance, and longevity. A program of regular inspection, cleaning, and timely repair-protected by fenders and proper winterization-will go a long way in keeping your boat in superb condition. Pamper the hull, and it will pay you back with endless smooth and pleasurable trips upon the water.

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