



SNOW

What To Do

Mike Haskell of Harbor Diving & Salvage is used to getting calls for zinc changes or winterization in January and February, but he never expected to spend the “slow” season pulling boat after boat from the bottom of the Bay. The 2009-2010 winter season on the Bay had so much snowfall that it prompted weather casters to create colorful headlines like Snowpocalypse and Snowmageddon.

Chesapeake sailors are ready for anything in any season, extreme heat, choppy seas, icy north winds, and even the odd hurricane. But apparently, record snowfall was something that caught even the saltiest locals by surprise. We have our winteriza-

tion list, and we check it twice, but prepping your sailboat for three feet of snowfall in one storm was probably not on that list, until now.

The list of boats Haskell helped raise from the frigid depths reads like a broker’s listing page, Gemini, Tanzer, Irwin, Rainbow. The snow storms did not discriminate between cruising and racing sailor or between powerboat and sailboat. It didn’t matter much what part of the Bay the boat was on or what sort of facility it was kept in. Haskell said there were two things that made so many boats sink in last year’s snow storms: improper winterization and unattended boats.

That Sinking Feeling

Here's a little fun math, get out your number two pencil if you want to play along. Snow weighs 10 pounds per cubic foot. On our 44-foot catamaran with a 24-foot beam, we have about 800 square feet of solid deck space (not counting the tramps or covered cockpit). Each foot of snow that fell on our boat added eight thousand extra pounds of weight. Each of the three major storms last winter brought approximately three feet of snow which equals 24,000 extra pounds on a boat that only weighs 16,000 pounds unloaded. It was like having another boat plopped on top of ours and then some. Your boat may be fast, and it may be seaworthy, but no recreational sailboat was meant to sustain that kind of weight.

So, a few thousand extra pounds are sitting on top of your boat. More than likely that doesn't just sink you down past your waterline; it probably just pushed one of your thru hulls underwater too. You know, that one thru hull you never worry about because it doesn't lead to anything important or is "so far above" the waterline it doesn't matter anyhow? Not anymore. And of course you have scuppers in your cockpit, so you don't think twice about get-

ting swamped by a snowdrift. But winter is dirty. Those scuppers that haven't been looked at since that lighted boat parade are full of dead leaves, dust, and general outdoor funk that have now rendered them useless. Or there is ice blocking them up. Or the hoses have cracked just in the wrong place.

The storm is over, and now melting snow becomes fresh water, which weighs about 62 pounds per cubic foot. I don't care how small your cockpit is, that's not a good thing. Now your cockpit can't drain, and there are some elephants partying in there. Worse yet, the weight is likely not balanced (darn that wind), so pretty soon something's gotta give and *splush!* Water is rushing into your cockpit from the transom or one side or another. It's just a matter of minutes before Mike has to don his dry suit, and the insurance company has to be called.

My husband woke up during one of the blizzards to a "glug glug glug" sound. I am thankful he's a light sleeper, because he dashed out of bed to find that one of those innocuous thru hulls on our St. Francis 44 catamaran was underwater and so now was one of our storage lockers. The good news is we're liveaboards. Even though I

was in Hawaii for the storms with my son (yeah, go ahead, hate me), my husband was keeping the home fires burning and happened to be home at 3 a.m. on a random Tuesday night. Most boat owners are not liveaboards. It's like one of those curfew old public service announcements on television, "It's 3 a.m., do you know where your boat is?"

Don't Be a Stranger

I know the last thing you want to do when it's 20-something degrees outside, the wind is howling, and the streets are barely plowed is drag yourself away from the fireplace and your hot toddy to go check on your sailboat. But it's better than getting "that call" from the marina manager. Check on your boat. If snow is in the forecast, go before the storm and check your thru hulls and scuppers. If it's coming down fast and furious for more than a couple of hours, consider checking your boat during the storm with a shovel in hand. And as soon as the storm is over, head out to your dock or mooring, and get to work. You can have an extra hot toddy when you get back home.

"Community docks are the worst," says Haskell. "They often are at the bottom of a

Now in our 44th year!



Dear Travis and Colin:
We've had a wonderful summer of sailing...and have received numerous compliments on the sails, Mack-Packs, boat. We've done a bit of racing and, after a classic boat race, one competitor (a sailmaker in Seattle) said he was really impressed with our sails...
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Winter Storm Check List

- Make sure your boat is properly tied up so that no part gets stuck under the dock during low water periods brought on by winter northwest winds.
- Terminate all thru hulls if you are not going to be aboard full time. Yes, even the “safe” ones.
- If you can't visit your boat in the off season, find someone who can, such as a marina employee, a yacht maintenance company, a friendly liveaboard, or a local friend.
- Check batteries on pumps and pump position.
- Check the corrugated hoses on pumps for cracks.
- If you have a bilge pump in a small open daysailer, make sure the terminus of the hose is lower than the pump inside the boat, or you'll create a reverse siphon and start sucking water into your boat. Don't you wish you'd paid better attention in science class? Mike suggests a simple wire tie to keep the hose in the proper place.

Safety First

Every year we lose a boater in the wintertime here on the Chesapeake Bay to an unfortunate dockside accident. Don't be macho or careless. Take a few precautions to make sure your trip down the dock to check the boat isn't your last.

- Go with a buddy. If you only do one thing, this is that thing. Don't go visiting your boat in the winter time alone. Bribe a friend with a beer, and go in pairs. It's your best insurance against an accident on a slippery dock or deck.
- If you can't go with a friend, at the very least tell someone where you are going and when you expect to be back.
- Yak Trax (yaktrax.com). A funny name for an ingenious little product that every winter sailor should have. They are like a rubber spider web with metal coils that slip over your shoe—human snow tires. If you can't get a hold of some, at least wear smart shoes with good treads and not your yacht club loafers. Slippery ice sheets are hard to spot on the docks and can turn your non-skid into a skating rink.
- Bring a signaling device like a whistle with you. Once you are in the cold water you won't have the strength or presence of mind to yell for help, but you might manage a tweet.
- And for heaven's sake wear a PFD. Cold water incapacitates you faster than you think.



hill and not around anything else, so the snow drifts are huge and untouched. I actually had to bring my gear in by sled to some community docks.” He reminds boat owners that it's worth the trip to keep your boat afloat. Mike knows this first hand because in a cold twist of irony, his dive boat was the only one at his marina to sink.

Sailing may be a seasonal sport, but boats are not seasonal creatures. They require attention all year long, and mid-snow storm is no time to turn a blind eye and be a fair weather friend.