

13-Point Small-Boat Checklist



photo-Art Michaels

If you'll be fishing in your boat during the next month or so, use this information to guide you through an inspection of your boat and equipment. Spotting a problem now could save you much time, money and aggravation.

Life jacket. Check your life jackets for wear, tears, holes and broken or missing parts. This is the one item aboard your boat that can save your life, so treat it carefully. Wear your life jacket when on board your boat.

Battery. You'll want to remove the battery from the boat during the off-season. But for now, perform a check similar to the kind of maintenance and inspection you'd undertake at season's end. Wire-brush the terminals to keep them clean and check the cells to see if they need to be refilled with distilled water. Charge the battery, if necessary, and then check the lights, radio, GPS and other electronic gear to ensure that all these devices work. Also inspect the fuse box and be sure to carry extra fuses onboard.

Fire extinguisher. See that it is charged and securely stowed in a visible place onboard.

Visual Distress Signals. If you boat on Lake Erie, inspect your flares, and make sure their expiration dates are far enough in the future that they count toward the legal requirement.

Bilge. Inspect the bilge blower hose for leaks.

Through-hulls, drain plugs. Inspect all through-hulls and drain plugs. Make sure they're all closed. Leave them open when you store the boat for winter. Carry an extra plug with you onboard.

Engine. Inspect fuel hoses and lines. Replace hoses that are cracked, mushy or swollen. With a dry rag, inspect fuel connections for snugness. If they aren't secure, your nose will tell you if the rag doesn't. Check the bottom of your portable gas tank for rust. Carry an extra spark plug.

Prop. Inspect the blades for dings, pitting and any other surface marks that can cause excessive vibration. Inspect cotter pins. Carry extra shear pins and cotter pins.

Cables. The control cable outer jacket should have no cracks or swelling. If it does, the cable is corroded and needs to be replaced.

Steering. Check the power steering and power trim oil levels.

Anchor and line. Make sure your anchor line and connections are sound. Replace worn parts and line.

Navigation lights. Make sure they work properly and carry extra light bulbs.

Tools. Carry tools that let you change a spark plug, propeller and your shear pin. Include a first aid kit with your tools, and replace the first aid kit's items as necessary. Include a fully charged cell phone as part of your essential items. ☐

This information is provided by the BoatU.S. Foundation. Visit its web site at www.boatus.com/foundation/sportsman. For details on boat legal requirements in Pennsylvania, go to the Commission's web site, www.fish.state.pa.us, and on the right, click on "Boating." For more online resources, visit www.uscgboating.com.