

Boat Cleaning

It's spring, the boat cover is off and the gelcoat needs attention. We would like to have clean and protected topsides and cockpit areas but who wants to do all that hard work?

Unfortunately, the work can't be avoided but it can be significantly reduced by using effective products and proven application techniques.

Although there are dozens of available boat cleaning products, we at Collins Bay Marina lean on four main products for our cleaning and waxing jobs. These products are: Collinite 920 fiberglass cleaner; Rolite metal and fiberglass cleaner/polish; Shurhold Buff Magic cleaner/polish; and Collinite Fleet paste wax. All of these products are safe and effective for boats that have their original gelcoat. The correct application of these products involves two steps: a cleaning step followed by a waxing/sealing step. Many people are comfortable using a one-step method whereby a single product is used to both clean and wax/protect the gelcoat surface in one "easy" operation. We have found that such products tend to take much more energy to apply and that the outcome is simply not nearly as good as using a separate cleaner and a separate waxing/sealing product.

For boats where the gelcoat is free of oxidation and not overly dirty Collinite 920 is our first-choice cleaning product. We have found it is best applied by putting a small amount on a microfiber cloth when the ambient temperature is between 15C and 20C. We always try to avoid cleaning areas that are in direct sunlight as the product will dry too quickly. As we work the product into a small area of the gelcoat, two feet by two feet, immediate positive results become evident. We allow the product to set up for a minute or two and then, with a second clean microfiber cloth, we remove the product ensuring that no residue is left on the gel coat. After having cleaned eight to ten linear feet of the topsides, we then complete the process with an application of Collinite Fleet paste wax. We apply the wax with a clean cloth to an area not more than two feet by two feet at a time, allowing a couple of minutes for the product to setup, and then we remove it with a clean cloth ensuring no wax residue remains. We then buff the surface with a second clean cloth or with a mechanical buffer. One valuable lesson that experience has taught us is that we never end a working session without having waxed all of the areas that we have cleaned. Leaving the waxing for another time usually results in having to repeat some of the cleaning process.

For boats where there is evidence of mild oxidation on the gelcoat we use Rolite metal and fiberglass polish/cleaner. This product is applied in the same manner as Collinite 920. The difference is that the Rolite is slightly more abrasive than the Collinite product and it will remove light oxidation and more significant dirt from the gelcoat with the same amount of effort as the Collinite product. This results in a deep cleaning of the gelcoat and a very noticeable improvement. As it is difficult to completely seal and adequately protect the newly cleaned gelcoat with a single coat of Collinite Fleet paste wax, we usually apply two coats of wax to any surfaces that we have cleaned with Rolite. Once the surface has been cleaned, and the first coat of wax has been applied, the second coat of wax takes much less time and effort

to apply. The result is a clean surface with good lustre that is sealed and protected for the season.

For boats where the gelcoat shows signs of significant oxidation, or indicates a significant period of neglect, we use Shurhold Buff Magic in the cleaning step. This product is similar to the Rolite product but it is more abrasive than the Rolite. We usually use a power buffer to apply this product and, in extreme cases, it may require two applications in order to achieve a clean surface. We follow this cleaning phase with two applications of Collinite Fleet paste wax in order to adequately seal and protect the gelcoat surface. As one would expect, this process takes more time and effort but the results can be quite dramatic as the former beauty of the gelcoat begins to emerge.

If your boat no longer sports its original gelcoat and has been repainted, then please disregard what you have read to this point. This situation calls for a different approach entirely. Repainted surfaces are more delicate than the original gelcoat and should be treated accordingly. Mechanical devices such as power polishers are not recommended for repainted surfaces. Cleaning a repainted boat is similar to cleaning and protecting the paint surface of a motor vehicle. We first wash the topsides using a product such as Awlgrip Wash Down Concentrate. We add the recommended amount of this product to a bucket of clean warm water and apply it to the hull with a wash mitt once the hull has been hosed down. Once the hull has been cleaned and rinsed with clear water, we employ a natural chamois to completely dry the surface. In the final step we apply a product such as Awlgrip Awlcare to seal and protect the surface. This product is a protective polymer sealer that is effective on all clean repainted surfaces. Its application is a simple wipe onto a limited area with a microfiber cloth and immediately wipe off with a separate and clean microfiber cloth. We have experienced very good results with these products. Note: this product is not to be confused with the product known as Poly Glow. I personally do not recommend Poli Glow for use in any marine application.

Boat cleaning does not have to be a dreadfully difficult and unpleasant experience. If the appropriate products are used as intended, and if one breaks the job up into doable chunks, a lot of unnecessary pain can be avoided. Even a neglected boat can be brought back to a pleasing appearance if a regular cleaning routine is initiated. Please remember that a boat with gelcoat that is less than pleasing in appearance did not arrive at that state in a single season and it may well take several seasons of TLC for your boat to regain its former glory. However, I think you will find that the investment of time and energy is a very good investment.

Happy Boating!