

## Hurricane Preparedness Securing your boat before a storm

The intent of this article is to benefit the reader from my experience for the purpose of securing a vessel against imminent storm damage. I have handled hundreds of claims of every kind regarding storm damage to boats from sinking and flying debris to total barn collapse and marina devastation. I have seen first-hand what works, what doesn't, and what makes things worse.

Glossary of terms

Storm: Any named or predicted tropical depression or windstorm.

Trailer-kept: A vessel stored ashore upon a trailer.

Lift-kept: Any vessel stored on a cradle-type hoist, excluding water or buoyancy lifts and davits.

Jet dock: Not something you want your boat on during a hurricane.

Marina-stored: A vessel secured to a fixed or floating dock system comprised of many such docks in a line or branch.

Hauled: A vessel that is removed from the water and stored ashore on stands or blocks.

Barn-stored: Any vessel stored ashore in a dry-stack facility.

Wet-slipped: Any vessel tied to the dock and afloat at a singular dock commonly adjoining the owner's residence.

Let's start with wet-slipped boats. The most common issue I see here is too much scope. By far the overwhelming class of damage seen post-storm to wet-slipped boats is dock rash and chaffing from pilings, docks, and sea walls. This is followed by wind-driven debris damage (roof tiles). In all the claims and all the boats in all the storms I have never even one time seen a boat severely damaged from too little scope of the mooring lines. Think about it. If we get 10 feet of surge the house dock, lot, and neighborhood will be gone. Think your boat will still be there because you left the lines slack?

Try this recommendation. Tighten those mooring lines a little. Maybe more than a little. I have seen zero damage from insufficient scope on spring lines and plenty from boats bashing against sea walls and pilings. Rope gets wet and stretches, especially nylon. Make sure the vessel is secured off the dock for high tide, plus just a little extra (not 10 feet extra). Why allow scope for 10 feet of surge when that much surge will take out the whole Island anyway? Add just a little, and keep the vessel off the pilings. Any spare ground tackle you have should be deployed to the direction of open water and bridled tight upon two cleats. This will act to pull the boat away from structure as the tide rises. For most local docks that would mean setting an anchor abreast and possibly fore or aft. Set them long and deep with a small boat, and mark the rode with a buoy or jug.

Neighbors helping neighbors makes this task much easier.

With marina-stored and barn-kept or barns and marina wet-slips, when faced with leaving the boat in her normal disposition, you must first and foremost adhere to the facilities guidelines. Ask the dock master or manager for a copy of the facility protocol, and ask for his or her input regarding your boat's particular situation. But please remove your canvas.

If you are lucky enough to have your yacht hauled for a storm install, or commission the yard to install some anchors, this doesn't need to be fancy or expensive. For concrete pads simple lead anchors and ring bolts work well. An expansion bolt with three links of

chain works even better. For soft ground use some augers commonly available at home improvement stores. Install one at each corner at a steep angle and tie off using a truckers knot or ratchet straps. Put as many blocks and stands under the boat as you can find, and remove the garboard drain plug, if equipped. Please do not tie off to neighboring boats. That actually happened to me a few years ago. My own 32-foot boat was on the hard, and I had spent a long hot day setting augers, lines, and blocks only to come by the next day to find the two neighboring boat owners sole means of preparation was to tie their boats to mine. A sharp pocketknife made short work of their efforts.

If your boat is trailer kept outdoors, you can follow the same guidelines as outlined above, but use three anchors — two aft and one forward. The tow vehicle, if left hitched counts as one. Tie the boat to the trailer short and tight, and then tie the trailer to the ground. Again, tie it steep and tight, remove the bilge plug, and turn off the battery switch.

Here is how I secure the Baitkiller. I first put momma's car in the garage, close the door, and ease her bumper right up against the closed door. I then pull my truck with the boat behind it up to the garage door, effectively pinning the garage door firmly between two vehicles. I then set two Red Head 5/8-inch expansion bolts in the driveway with three links of chain on each. The chain simply gives me something to tie off on. These are positioned at a steep angle under the stern eyes of the boat at about 45 degrees. Two ratchet straps from boat to bolt, and the old girl is snug as can be, and I have wind-proofed that weak aluminum garage door at the same time.

Take a ride down a canal and see how many boats on lifts are tied off wrong. Most of them unfortunately are. A common practice is lift the boat way up in the air and string lines all over the dock to every cleat and piling available. Guess what happens to that boat in a category IV hurricane? The boat will come about half way off the lift, fill with water, break the lift, and partially sink in a tangled mess.

Tie the boat to the lift with short, straight lines, and then tie the lift to the dock. I'll say it again. Tie the boat to the lift with short, tight lines. Then tie the lift to the dock to limit sway. Surge is the least of your concerns. Don't lift the boat 10 feet over the dock. Allow for a couple extra feet of surge tide, and pull the plug. Try to orient the lift for good drainage, and make sure the hatch drains and the scuppers are clear.

In closing a few notes

Remove your canvas. No matter where your boat is secured, you must remove your canvas. If you can pull all the side panels and window panels, do it. Rolling the window panels up doesn't count. It takes less than an hour and less than \$20 to re-lace an awning. Remove the mooring covers, and store all loose gear below or ashore.

Drop all sails and store them below. I guarantee if you leave your head sail rolled up in a hurricane, it will eat itself alive and trash your boat and your neighbor's boat in the process. Folks I walked some marina docks with the day before Wilma saw more than one owner actually installing camper canvas, and the majority of head sails were still aloft. Your neighbors will thank you for not doing this. Remove everything you can, on my management yachts after pulling all canvas, I duct tape a piece of .006-inch plastic over the dash. It works very well. You may also use painters' tape to seal door jams and secure loose hatch covers. Just remember to get that tape off as soon as you can while you still can. Sun and water will make it permanent in less than a week.

Get your insurance policy set early. No underwriter will write a boat policy when there is a named storm approaching. Can you prove what your boat is worth?

Many policies are actual cash value and will only pay what they estimate your boat was worth before the incident regardless of coverage limits. Appraisals are available and cost less than a full survey.

Get a professional survey at least every two or three years. A survey on any vessel will help you identify any problems with structure, self bailing or de-watering as well as give you a current document outlining the pre storm condition and value of your boat and its equipment issued by an objective professional.

Secure your boat early, take a few photos, board up the house, and get away. Take your loved ones as far from harm's way as possible. I can replace my boats but not my family. You may e-mail Capt. Campbell with questions, comments and ideas for topics you would like to see him address at [Baitkiller@comcast.net](mailto:Baitkiller@comcast.net) or 389-9769. Campbell AMS is an Accredited Marine Surveyor associated with the Society of Accredited Marine Surveyors, The American Boat and Yacht Council and the Collier County Marine Trades organization.