

Time to ready your boat for a storm is now, UF researcher says

July 20 2006



Florida Sea Grant agent Bob Wasno demonstrates proper boat-tying technique at the Fort Myers Yacht Basin last month.

Boat owners should prepare for a hurricane now, not when a storm is bearing down on them, a University of Florida Sea Grant specialist warns.

Bob Wasno, based in Fort Myers with the UF-affiliated coastal research and education program, reminds boat owners that preparation is imperative and procrastination can be dangerous.

“Each and every boat is going to be a little different,” he said. “And there’s a whole checklist of things that need to be done.”

First on that list: Decide where to put your boat when a storm is on the way.

Boats that are stored ashore are much more likely to escape damage than those stored in the water, officials say.

“It’s not necessarily the safest place when you’re in a marina with 50 other boats. Chances are that one of them is not going to be tied down right,” he said.

And just one loose boat can damage many others, Wasno said.

If your boat is on land, the best place is inside a garage. If that’s not feasible, parking the boat and trailer away from trees but close to a building is a good bet.

Let some air out of the trailer tires and block the wheels so it won’t roll. Wooden blocks should be placed between the trailer’s frame and springs, and the boat filled no more than halfway with water. Then lash the boat to the ground at all four corners.

For boats kept at a marina, preparations are even trickier.

That’s why Leif Lustig, dockmaster at the Fort Myers Yacht Basin, says he and his staff begin reminding their patrons – many of them people who live on their boats – early in the season to start preparing.

Though procrastination is human, Lustig says they do their best to counter it.

“I think that’s pretty much the way people think. But I think we’ve got it a little more in their minds to get ready here,” he said. “And if we can keep anybody’s insurance premiums down, the better off we all are.”

One of the most important things boat owners forget is to have duplicate copies of ownership paperwork, such as the boat’s registration, stored someplace other than on the boat, where it can easily be damaged, Lustig said.

“Mail it to your mother in Paducah, I don’t care, just have it someplace off the boat,” he said.

Among their other recommendations:

- Remove any gear, such as canvas tops, that can act as a sail.
- Anything on deck that can’t be removed, such as chairs, cushions or grills, should be lashed.
- Dock lines should be doubled, at a minimum, and should be as long as possible to accommodate storm surge.
- You’ll need chafing gear at all rub points. There are readymade types of chafe protection, or garden hose is another option. In a pinch, using duct tape to bind heavy canvas or denim to the lines can work.
- Make sure bilge pumps work.
- If the boat is in a slip, it’s best to tie it so that it’s in the middle, rather than close to the dock, to keep the boat from banging into the dock.
- When the boat is secure and the storm is imminent, head for higher ground. Trying to ride out a storm on a boat is a terrible idea.

-- If you're a part-time resident, make sure there is a permanent resident who can act as your boat's caretaker.

Source: University of Florida

Citation: Time to ready your boat for a storm is now, UF researcher says (2006, July 20)
retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2006-07-ready-boat-storm-uf.html>

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