

# Pre-Launch Checklist

Before launching a boat for the first time each season, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' Division of Watercraft urges boaters to complete the following checklist to reduce the chances of being unprepared while out on Ohio's waterways.

- **Check the boat registration.** Boat registrations expire on March 1 of the year displayed on the boat sticker. For example, if your tag says "2003," you need to renew your registration this year before you put your boat on the water.
- **Check your safety equipment.** Look at the required equipment chart in the Division of Watercraft publication Ohio Boat Operator's Guide (or follow the link at the bottom of this page) to make sure you have all the equipment needed on your boat after it has been stored.
- **Inspect your life jackets.** In addition to making sure you have a properly sized wearable life jacket for each passenger, check each life jacket for mildew, rot and tears in the material, seams and straps. Discard and replace any damaged life jackets.
- **Check flares and fire extinguishers.** Buy new flares if their expiration dates have expired, and make sure the fire extinguisher is properly charged.
- **Check the first-aid kit.** Replace any supplies that were used last season or have passed the expiration date.
- **Check fittings.** Thru-hull fittings below the waterline should be tight; sea valves should operate freely. Make sure the boat plug is on board and in good condition.
- **Check for winter damage.** Inspect non-metallic thru-hulls; they get brittle with age and winter ice can crack or loosen them. Look for hoses that have been forced off or split from freezing. Every spring, boats sink at the dock when these problems go undetected until the first heavy rain.
- **Check the fuel system.** Inspect fuel fittings and hoses; replace if cracked or showing other signs of stress.
- **Check electronic gear.** Get fresh batteries for portable electronic gear, radios, handheld GPS and flashlights. Inspect connections on lights and the horn and other equipment wired in to the boat.
- **Inspect dock and anchor lines for chafing.** Replace lines if signs of wear are present.
- **Check the boat trailer.** Inspect trailer tires for wear and inflate properly. Check the trailer frame for rust spots; inspect the wheel bearings and re-pack if necessary. Test the trailer's lights before towing.
- **Check the oil.** Creamy brown or gray engine or drive oil has water in it and a mechanic should find the source of the leak before you start the engine.
- **Examine sailboat rigging:** Check for signs of corrosion and wear and for leaks where chain plate mountings come through the deck.
- **Check charts and maps.** Are navigational charts and waterway guides current? Channel markers and buoys change frequently so it is a good idea to update guides every few years.