

Antifouling - Getting It Off

We are all aware of the scare stories regarding osmosis, but fortunately in a Shrimper the possibility is practically nil. Good housekeeping and a sound boat design/build keep us all in a fairly comfortable state.

Each year we look forward to cleaning, improving and maintaining our craft. When it comes to re-varnishing there is great joy in preparing and finishing wood, fittings can be removed, oiled and replaced if necessary, but antifoul removal - what a chore!

There are a number of reasons to remove antifoul and these can best be summarised as follows:

1. Checking for hull damage or osmosis.
2. Checking hull fittings.
3. Removing numerous makes and specifications of antifoul that has built up over the years.

Generally it makes sense to remove antifouling to the gel coat every four/five years. This enables the above to be incorporated in a routine maintenance programme, and on a practical level, allows for the re-application of a type of antifoul that you, the present owner, has chosen. The bottom sides are as important as the topsides.

Now the problem of removal and, like others, I considered **scraping**. A long laborious job, this is never 100% and has the potential for damaging the all-important gel coat. Unless you have a desire to spend countless weekends hand scraping, then avoid this at all costs.

Then there is **high pressure wet blasting**. This satisfies the desire to use brute force and a nifty piece of kit. The process involves directing a high-pressure stream of water at 2000-3000 PSI, with grit being added at the lance end. The system is effective and quick, but uses way too much water, and can (because of the high-pressure) lead to damage to the hull. With these two options the choice then comes down to, well, lets just apply another coat of antifoul and leave it for another season.

There is a third option, the **SPS system**, that utilises low pressure, typically 05-115 PSI. The grit is added to the water before being propelled to the hull surface resulting in a misting procedure that gently removes all anti-foul down to the gel coat. The resulting surface is keyed for re-application of either gel shield or, if not required, antifoul. The process is quick and efficient and takes about 4 hours to complete. The result is a Shrimper that moves through the water with even greater ease. The added advantage of having all fittings and rudder stripped allows for greater peace of mind.