

## Getting The Best Of Repairs

Let's be honest, breakdowns and must-do repairs are a matter of when, not if. Being prepared helps, and the BoatU.S. Consumer Protection Bureau has tips for making the experience less stressful

By Caroline Ajootian



**R**egardless of how adept you are at routine repairs and maintenance work, the time will come when you need the services of a marine mechanic or carpenter. Don't wait for a breakdown! The best time to find a good technician is before an emergency occurs.

If your boat and engine are still covered by the manufacturers' warranties, your local dealer will be your first stop. Even if the problem isn't covered by warranty, it's a good idea to discuss the problem with the dealer because work done by a non-dealer might void the warranty. If warranties aren't an issue, ask boat-owning friends or consult with a local marine surveyor to get recommendations for a carpenter, marine electrician, and engine mechanic. A repair shop with a mobile unit will make life easier if your boat can't be moved from its berth. Talk with the technician beforehand to get an idea of labor rates, travel charges, and other considerations.

### When There's A Problem

Your first step should be to prepare a written outline of what needs to be cor-

rected. This will form the basis of your work order when repairs begin. Particularly with engine problems, describe symptoms, rather than making a stab at what's wrong if you're not sure. Next, get several quotes for the job. Written estimates are essential for all high-ticket repairs. Be aware that only a handful of states have vessel-repair laws that require written estimates. Reputable companies will have no problem working with you on this. For complex repairs, such as structural hull work, consult with a marine surveyor and consider having the surveyor serve as a liaison with the repair shop.

Boat repairs can be complicated, so unforeseen obstacles are common. For example, what appears to be a minor leak through the cabin portholes can cause unsuspected rot in wooden structural members. Ask your repair shop how much similar repairs have cost in the past, and what kinds of problems are possible along the way.

Your repair list will become more detailed and may expand as you discuss the project with the shop or mechanic. Be sure the mechanic has a copy of your work order when the project begins.

To keep your sanity and checkbook reasonably intact, keep in mind the following:

- If your budget is tight, make this clear before the job begins. The shop may be able to suggest ways to complete the project in stages.
- Get a written estimate before work begins. Even so, an estimate is only an approximation of how much repairs will cost if unforeseen problems crop up later.
- Ask for a target completion date and write this into your work order.
- Ask if the repair shop will warrant its work — there's no requirement that they do — and get a clear explanation of what this entails; 30- or 60-day guarantees are the norm and may only cover parts, not labor.
- When tackling large jobs, boat repair shops often require payments at various stages of the project. Be sure to verify that each stage has been completed before paying. If you can't be on hand yourself, consider hiring a marine surveyor to make periodic checks.
- Ask the shop to obtain your authorization before proceeding with unforeseen repairs or when work goes beyond the estimated price. Ask to have old or damaged parts returned to you.

### When Things Go Awry ...

Before you pay the repair bill, inspect and, if necessary, sea-trial your boat or engine. Reporting problems immediately will make it easier to get the shop to take responsibility and correct them.

Rely on a marine surveyor for a second opinion if you're unhappy about workmanship or how repairs were made. Contact the manufacturer for assistance when warranty repairs are faulty.

If the shop refuses to cooperate, file a clear, written complaint with the shop, and keep all invoices to document your complaint.

Most boatyards and marinas require payment in full for repairs before boats

leave their premises. Maritime law gives providers of goods and services — for example, marinas, boatyards, and mechanics — the right to take legal action to “arrest” boats until repair and storage bills are paid. The legal process even gives them the right to recoup the value of their services by selling boats, or property on board, if bills aren’t paid promptly. Good service or bad, it’s up to the consumer to either pay up or prove that the debt is unfair.

To improve your chances of avoiding billing disputes and maritime liens:

- Ask for references before having repairs made. If you break down far from home, contact your boat manufacturer for suggestions about reliable shops in the area.
- Meet with the mechanic to discuss questions you have about the completed repairs or your invoice.
- Demonstrate good faith by agreeing to pay for undisputed portions of your bill.
- Get a second opinion from another mechanic or a marine surveyor.

■ Don’t stop payment on your check after you pay your repair bill. This can be interpreted as intent to defraud the repair shop and you might find yourself facing criminal charges.

### How BoatU.S. Can Help

■ Before doing business with a new repair facility, check for complaints online in the Consumer Protection Database; [my.BoatUS.com/consumer/database.aspx](http://my.BoatUS.com/consumer/database.aspx), or contact the Bureau at 703-461-2856 or [consumerprotection@BoatUS.com](mailto:consumerprotection@BoatUS.com).

■ Check out the free, online BoatU.S. “Guide to Marine Service” at [www.BoatUS.com/MarineServices](http://www.BoatUS.com/MarineServices).

■ Marine surveyor referrals are available at [www.BoatUS.com/insurance/survey.asp](http://www.BoatUS.com/insurance/survey.asp).

■ If you can’t resolve problems with a repair facility, contact the Consumer Protection Bureau. Our informal dispute-resolution program for members is an effective way to solve complaints.

## CONSUMER ALERTS FOR FEBRUARY 2011

Federal laws require manufacturers to issue defect-recall notices when boats or related equipment contain “defects which create a substantial risk of personal injury” or when they don’t comply with manufacturing regulations. The U.S. Coast Guard recently published the following notices:

**Parker Hannifin, Trident Rubber, Inc. (Recall 100019T)** 1/4-inch LPG solenoid valves: These valves were manufactured in March 2010 and sold to Trident Rubber, Inc., for use in marine liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) systems to control regulated low-pressure (0.40 psi) LPG flow to LPG appliances. The plunger that moves to open or close the valve-to-gas flow may be defective. They are sold to consumers as a Trident LPG kit. Parts involved in this recall are: Parker P/N 04F20C2-Z05A1FOC75 (date code J1010T, J1110T, or J1210T) and Parker P/N 04F20C2-Z05A1FOC80 (date code J1010T).

**Ranger Boats LLC, 870-453-2222 (Recall 100021T)** 2011 model year vessels Z520, Z521, Z522, 621VS, 620VS: A specific capacitor used in the power distribution box may fail. The internal heat generated may melt some of the potting compound in the power distribution box. There is the possibility that the hot compound may drip from the power distribution box, making contact with the boat’s operator, potentially causing injury. Recall repair involves installing a protective shield.

**Tracker Marine Group, 417-873-4540 (Recall 100017T)** Ski tow bar (P/N 149320) may fail, releasing skier inadvertently. Three cases of failure out of 178 installations occurred before the manufacturer requested this voluntary recall. This recall will replace P/N 149320 with P/N 150793.

**BRP U.S., Inc., 618-439-8794 (Recall 100018T)** 2010-11 model year 40-90 hp ETEC outboards: Clamps on hoses to the vapor separator may not be installed correctly. The outboards may experience a fuel leak, with a potential for fire or explosions, which could lead to serious injuries.

**Pleasurecraft, 803-345-1337 ext. 107 (Recall 100014T)** 2008-10 model year 6.0L direct drive engines: PCM is conducting a voluntary recall. Their warranty services department uncovered a defect: The remote oil filter hose runs too close to the exhaust manifold. There is a potential for chafing and burning, causing an oil leak and possible fire. Engines have serial numbers 485186 through 495957 and are installed on 2008-2010 model year boats.

For more information about these campaigns, contact the manufacturers directly or call the Coast Guard Boating Product Assurance Division, 202-372-1073. New recalls are listed monthly at the BoatU.S. National Recall Alert Registry, [www.BoatUS.com/recall](http://www.BoatUS.com/recall).

## PREVENT FUEL DAMAGE



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