

Tech Tips:

Cleaning Your Fresh Water Tank

By Bill Whitney

One of the problems we face every spring is cleaning the fresh water tank and water lines on the boat before heading out for summertime adventures. The goal is to kill and flush out all of the nasty algae and bacteria that have been growing in the fresh water system since last fall. There are several ways to accomplish the task, and several steps in the method described here. First you have to drain as much of the anti-freeze and old water out of the system as you can. This includes all the water lines, water heater (if you have one), and faucets.

After draining the system take a quarter cup of household bleach for every fifteen gallons of water that your fresh water tank holds. Mix the bleach with water, filling a one-gallon container and pour about one fourth of it into the fresh water tank. Let this sit for 5-10 minutes, since most of the 'bad actors' are in the bottom of your tank. Then add the remainder of the water/bleach mix and fill the fresh water tank as full as you can with water. Turn the water pump on, open all the faucets and run the water until you smell the bleach at each faucet, then close the faucets and shut off the pump. If the boat is in the water go for a sail so the water can move around to assist in cleaning the entire tank. Let it sit for at least 12 hours. Drain the entire system again and re-fill the fresh water tank with potable water. Make sure you use a white non-toxic drinking hose with an inline water filter to refill the system. Hoses not labeled safe for drinking water can contribute to lead and other dangerous chemicals getting into the water. Open all of the faucets and run the water until you no longer smell any bleach. It may be necessary to refill and drain your tank with fresh water again to eliminate all signs of bleach from the system. Once this is done it is safe to use your water system.

Got questions? Need answers? Bill is happy to respond to FSS members' inquiries and technical questions. Contact him at techtips@fss.org.