

HOW TO ...

Look after and maintain the ropes on your boat

Ropes have so many uses on a boat – mooring, lifelines, rigging, lifting/lowering drainage trunks, securing gear...the list goes on! And it's worth looking after them and not just so they look good!

Avoid damaging ropes

Avoiding actions such as treading on ropes, driving over them, dropping an anchor on them or letting them stay dirty will all help in maintaining rope condition.

Contamination of a rope can cause significant strength losses. Acids and alkalis will seriously damage some ropes and the effects may not be visible. Some ropes are designed to be resistant to common chemicals such as battery acids and cleaning alkalis, but others will be damaged and lose strength so it's best to avoid contamination. Failure could occur without warning, so contaminated ropes should be discarded.

Visually inspect ropes for damage

When inspecting ropes, work logically from one end to the other. Getting 'hands on' and feeling the rope can help too.

Chemicals, dirt, salt crystals, heat and light, can all damage fibres to some extent. Ropes will obviously wear when used and typical wear will be visible on the outside of a rope by the fibres becoming fluffy. The fluffy appearance is due to individual fibres breaking or wearing out. The strength loss due to this type of wear is usually insignificant but as it progresses whole yarns or strands will begin to lose strength. Significance of external damage can be visually assessed - when a single fibre rope does get worn or damaged, it will look damaged!

If yarns are pulled out or broken, or if the core is visibly showing through the sheath, then the rope is probably worn out and should be replaced. Rope inspection, in safety applications, is a skilled task forming part of the rope use routine and may need a trained inspector. However, in less demanding situations, assessing a rope can usually be a matter of common sense. If you're unsure, it's always worth seeking further advice, for example, from a rigger.

Washing ropes

Ropes can be hand washed in warm dilute soap solution, but this should be rinsed out thoroughly. Although a common practice, it's best to avoid using a washing machine to wash your ropes as this could damage them.

It's also possible to wipe ropes with a gentle soap and water solution by running the rope through a cloth. You could even do this a few times over.

Drying ropes

To dry freshly washed ropes, hang them in a dry and airy place. Ropes should be dried without knots tied in them and they should never be dried in front of a fire.

Storing ropes

Ropes should not be stored near a stove or other source of heat.

Depending on what the rope is used for, you may wish to coil it once it's cleaned and dried. When coiling ropes, add a twist with each turn and when you uncoil the rope, take the twists out. Three strand ropes will coil one way better than the other. Braided and 8 or 12 strand ropes will coil both ways but will need a twist with each coil.

As always, if you need any help or advice, contact us at RIBstore.co.uk and we'll be happy to help.