

POTABLE WATER FOR LONG RANGE BOATERS

One thing is for sure, bad water can make you sick and sicker quicker than almost anything else. Even technically “potable water” can taste terrible and make for a bad cup of coffee, iced tea and ruin food quality (potatoes and pasta). The second thing is that you can not always count on obtaining quality “city” treated water, but may find only marina “well” water containing high sulfur, high iron, etc. which the locals are used to, but you are not!

That is why it is so very important that long range boaters take extra measures to ensure that their on board water supply and shore water hookups are kept meticulously clean and pure of any contamination whatsoever.

In ones normal cruising area, most boaters know how to ensure good water -- good dockside filters, not filling tanks at some locations, bring drinking water from home, buy bottled water, etc. However, those who do long range cruising like the America’s Great Loop Cruise must be prepared for whatever is available - doing without is Not an option. Purchasing bottled water for consumption by mouth or cooking is inconvenient, heavy to transport and bulky to store.

START CLEAN AND KEEP IT THAT WAY. Drain the water tanks completely and then refill half way. Shock treat the tanks by adding 1/4 cup chlorine bleach for every 15 gallons of water. Top off the tanks and take the boat on a short cruise to shake things up a bit. Pump the tank water through each faucet so that all the lines are filled with the water/bleach mixture. Run the hot water longer to ensure that the hot water tank has filled with the mixture and it goes through the water lines and faucets. Let the water stand in the system for 6 to 8 hours and then drain the entire system. To remove the bleach odor, mix 1/2 cup of baking soda with a gallon of water and pour into the fresh water tank. Refill the tank(s) and completely pump this solution through the entire system including the hot water tank.

Purchase new FDA-approved drinking water hose. Don’t use common garden hoses because they typically are made from reground rubber or other materials which can impart taste, odor and impurities to your water supply. Also purchase end caps to seal the hose ends when not in use or connect the two hose ends together. It is a good idea to run a little bleach/water mixture through these hoses every once in a while (about once a month) to sterilize them.

Once you have a clean system, take every precaution to make sure that what you put in the tanks or goes through the shore water system is as clean and pure as possible. Start with a good charcoal and sediment filter (either two units or one combination unit) mounted in a convenient place, out of the sun if possible, where it can be observed and inspected regularly. Before hooking up to dockside water, run water out the spigot for a few minutes, until the water is cool and clear - when in doubt, fill a clear glass - look at it and smell it. Charcoal and sediment filters do just

that, they remove some odors, some bad tastes, and sediment (including sand and slime), but they DO NOT PURIFY the water!

TO INSURE “POTABLE WATER” EQUAL TO OR BETTER THAN BOTTLED WATER, you must install a PURIFICATION SYSTEM. Typically this is done at the galley sink and consists of an inline filter installed under the sink on the cold water line. The filter is connected to a separate spigot on the galley sink counter. In this way, you only purify the potable water you need, when you need it. A reduced flow and decreased water pressure alerts you that it is time to change the filter cartridge. Adding a water purifying chemical (biocide) to your tank(s) is also helpful, particularly if you do not use your house water supply frequently.

One such “filter” manufactured by General Ecology, Inc. <www.general-ecology.com> is the NATURE PURE® Ultrafine™ water purifier. Each cartridge purifies 500 gallons with a 1/2 gallon per minute flow rate. Nature Pure is the only unit we have found which takes out all of the following: Bacteria, Viruses, Chemicals, Chlorine, Foul Taste & Odors, Crptosporidia/Giardia, Lead, and Sediments. A larger model by the same company is the Sea Gull® IV whose cartridge purifies 1,000 gallons and has a one gallon per minute flow rate. CAUTION: many inline units do not remove Bacteria, Viruses, Chemicals, Lead, or Cyptosporidia/Giardia and instead are limited to the removal of Chlorine, Odor, Sediment and objectionable Taste.

Lastly, invest in a dockside pressure regulator which attaches between the dockside end of your water hose and the dock’s water faucet. Many city marinas have far too much water pressure (90 psi or more) which can blow apart your hoses and/or onboard water system. Do Not rely solely on the water regulator inlet that came with your boat!

Remember, storing a couple of hundred gallons of water in a tank(s) on a boat in the heat, which also came from a water line running down the docks in pipes, in the heat, and often not frequently used (transient) - is a recipe for all sorts of nasty things to contaminate your water system.

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