

Drying Your Sailing Gear

By Kevin Broome

There are few things worse than starting the day in wet gear!



Foul weather gear has become fairly impressive in recent years. Advances in technology and design have allowed sailors to stay warmer for longer. The articles of clothing may vary in shape, material, size, weight and color but they share the same purpose. Their main goal is relatively simple; keep sailors dry while allowing us to perform to the best of our abilities. Technical gear has waterproofing layers that will last you for a long time if you care for it properly. Always read the label of any new gear for a better idea of the manufacturer's "do's" and "don'ts."

Dry suits, foul weather gear, boots and gloves are all meant to get wet and to keep the sailors relatively dry. After a good day of sailing sometimes it can be challenging to manage the gear in the few hours that you have off the water and dry it effectively until it is needed again. Please check out some of my drying tips below.

Lets get a few general "**don'ts**" out of the way:

- 1.) Don't dry gear with salt on it if at all possible, rinse with fresh water first!
- 2.) Don't just leave gear in sailing bag, trunk or closet and hope it'll dry.
- 3.) Don't put your sailing gear in the dryer; it causes artificial wear.
- 4.) Don't put your sailing gear in the microwave.
- 5.) Don't put your sailing gear in the oven.
*It can be done in some ovens, but the risk far out ways the benefit.
- 6.) Don't wash your sailing gear in a hot water cycle if you can help it.
- 7.) Don't leave your gear outside for days on end; UV rays eventually breakdown the materials.
- 8.) Don't use a heat lamp for an extended period of time and please don't leave gear near a heat lamp unattended!
- 9.) Don't hang your gear over a sharp(ish) fence.
- 10.) Don't wash your gear excessively... rinsing after each use with mild soaps is fine but excessive washing and drying weathers the gear quicker.

If you are sailing near a venue close to home and have the luxury of going back to your house every night there are going to be more options available to you than if you are staying as a guest at someone else's home or at a hotel. Rinsing the gear in the shower and then letting it drip dry in bathroom may work in some households but certainly not in all.



At home:

Many sailing families try to set up an area usually in a basement, 2nd shower, spare room or sheltered spot in the outside yard where sailing gear can dry safely on its own. Some helpful things to consider when choosing and setting up an indoor drying area are finding a spot with proper drainage, access to windows and maybe able to take advantage of house hold heating vents. If available, try to gather dehumidifiers, fans, coat hangers, drying racks, newspapers, towels, and maybe an air freshener or two.

For a drying spot with low air circulation try to make use of a dehumidifier or fan. Using both tends to cancel each other out so just pick one! Hang the gear out using coat hangers, drying racks, coat racks, clotheslines or old chairs where the paint won't run. The more surface area that is exposed the faster the article(s) will dry.

For a drying spot with a higher air circulation try to make use of your houses air vents (just not to close!), windows, fans and drafts. The more dry air that is flowing over the gear, the faster the water will disappear. In warmer locations keep the dew point in mind; if the air is moist your gear can get wetter than when it started!

For boots and gloves: try drip drying and then stuffing with dry newspapers. Change the newspapers every few hours if possible. After the boots are mostly dry throw in a dryer sheet to suck up some of the last bits of moisture plus it will help your boots smell a little less funky.

* Newspapers slow a dehumidifier's progress but it is faster in the short term.

At a host's home:

Ask before you do anything. The old adage of "it's better to ask forgiveness after than for permission prior" doesn't apply here. Wet gear can do major damage and make things very awkward for your self, your hosts and future sailors that may be passing through. Brainstorm with your host about possible storage solutions as to the best way to dry gear with out damaging the gear or the home.

Often times making use of a fence, clothesline or a hanger in the basement with a bucket underneath is a better choice than inconveniencing the host and having your lose future housing or friendship. Drip dry gear in the shower for as long as possible, to help minimize any issues such as puddles on the carpet later in the evening.

Unconventional home remedies:

1.) There are some beer fridges that have a defrost/dehumidify setting. Putting small gear in an empty fridge on this setting works for some models. It's generally not the fastest of methods.

2.) Wood stoves, pellet stoves and other dry heat sources can quickly dry out gear but make sure the gear is not too close to the heat source. Make sure you don't mind having that room smell a little off for a day or two.

3.) Cracking a window to create a draft and hanging gear underneath the open window is a terrible waste of resources but should dry gear faster than just hanging it inside to dry.



At a hotel:

Hotels have different resources than most homes have. You need to take advantage of the shower to rinse your gear and then let it drip dry inside the shower if possible. Once it has drip-dried, take advantage of the extra towels. For soft gear lay a towel flat on the bed or floor. Lay one article of clothing on the towel and then wrap the towel up with the gear inside. Slowly squeeze the towel to try and suck up moisture from the gear. Once you do this for one article repeat for all of them! After things are "sort of dry" place articles of clothing where the most air will pass over them. Take advantage of the room's heating unit, windows or fans.

Unconventional hotel remedies:

1.) Many ice machines and liquid vending machines have air intakes on the back sides that often pump out an impressive amount of hot, dry air. If you can hang gear out of sight on a hanger (not too close to the machine) behind the machine it will dry without making your room smell funky.

* Keep theft in mind - some hotels are safer than others

2.) If the weather is nice and the air is relatively dry, take advantage of any balconies that are available. Tie or weigh down articles of clothing so they don't blow away.

*Depending on hotels location and rules sometimes its better to watch the gear (theft deterrent) and other times its better to disappear (hotel can't ask you remove the gear from sight if they can't find you). Most hotel managers aren't thrilled with having clothes displayed all over their walkways and balconies. In general, hotels try to not look the opposite of the back yard of a run down trailer park.

3.) Construct your own clothes line to drip dry gear. Old mainsheets and tie down lines are excellent for this purpose.



Unconventional car methods:

We've all been in the situation where the gear didn't dry over night for whatever reason (its usually because it never left the bag, trunk or closet). Below are some tips to minimize the wetness.

- 1.) If you have a dry towel use the towel trick before starting the drive.
- 2.) Hanging gear out the window can work in some scenarios depending on car model, driving speed and crosswinds. Its not usually a good idea because it makes gear flap and weather that much faster, plus it can blow out the window and become lost or damaged.

*Its better to crack the windows and hang gear inside on hangars if possible

- 3.) Put the inside layers of the gear on early and turn up the heat... warm damp gear beats cold damp gear in most situations.
- 4.) Try to make use of the heating vents just prior to going on the water for gloves and boots.
- 5.) There are some articles of clothing can be wrung out prior to the air drying method. Most things with technical water repellent/prooofing on the exterior shouldn't be wrung out because it damages that exterior coating.

Venue methods:

Try to arrive at the sailing site a little early to check wind, water conditions, and plan your last minute clothing changes appropriately. Take advantage of the extra time to let the sun and wind get your gear a little drier if not completely dry. Set up a clothesline in an out of the way place. Hang clothing off trailers or if necessary (and it won't ruin the paint job) Take advantage of hanging gear off of your vehicle's roof racks and side mirrors if possible. Last minute efforts can go a long way, but take care that your stuff doesn't disappear from theft or wind. Damp gear tends to be much better than no gear at all!



Quick tips:

- 1.) Start drying gear early; as in as soon as possible. The more time gear has to dry the better chance it will have of being dry by the time it is needed next.
- 2.) After boots or sailing sneakers are dry, throw in a dryer sheet in each to suck up any remaining moisture. As an added bonus it will make the boots smell a little less funky for the next time they are used.
- 3.) Dry the inside of gear first; we want the inside water free. That's the part that touches our layering clothing and/or our bodies, so turn dry-suits and foul weather gear inside out when drying to get the important parts first. Once the inside has dried, turn in it right side out and then dry the outside!
- 4.) Rinsing and drying gear will prevent gear will also help gear smelling clean. Most "sailing smell funks" are thanks to mold, bacteria and other fun things growing in part to the moisture left over from the last adventure.

5.) Properly drying and storing gear will allow you to extend the life spans for several if not many seasons.

*Some technical gear like dry suits should have things like seal and zipper savers applied before being stored for long periods of time.

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