

Subject:

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De-winterize your RV for Spring

Now that it's officially spring, I'm restless to dust out the cobwebs and pack the family up for a weekend excursion. And, I know I'm not the only one feeling this way. So this year I wrote down a game plan for getting my Big Country opened up for spring, and thought I would share the process with my readers. I figure a checklist will work as a good pre-emptive strike, rather than discovering a major issue in July when I want nothing else but to be on vacation.

So here it is. My RV's spring maintenance checklist:

1. Clean the exterior and inspect for damage

Remove any coverings on your windows or wheels and give your rig a good wash. Put some elbow grease into the process, too, making sure to use proper brushes and cleaning agents for the type of exterior materials on your RV. Avoid using a pressure washer as it can actually cause damage to your finish. Once your RV is thoroughly scrubbed clean, open up all the windows and vents to let it air out. You might even need to add a few air fresheners or some Damp Rid to help get rid of any musty odors.

2. Inspect the roof and awnings

Give your roof a good visual inspection for damage from the elements. Check the seams, vents and roof edges very carefully. Once you know your roof is in good order, extend your awnings and look for any pinholes that may have developed while in storage. It's a good idea to repair any damage you find now before you head out later in the season. (I also recommend checking out Lakeshore RV for the best deal on awning repair kits.) Just be sure to know what material your awning is made from. You will also want to give your awning a thorough scrub. If you notice any black mildew from storage, scrub the awning with bleach water to remove the mildew spots.

3. Check your 12-Volt DC System

Reinstall your batteries if you pulled them for the winter. Make sure your terminals are clean, dry, and tight. Also, be sure to check the fluid level, and add water if needed. Then charge the batteries fully. Finally, go through your RV and turn on your various 12-volt components to ensure the battery is functioning properly.

4. Check your 120-Volt AC System

Check your shoreline cord's prongs for any oxidation that may have occurred since its last use. Use a fine sandpaper or steel wool to brighten up the prongs. Before you plug in, check the polarity of the outlet you're plugging into. **IMPORTANT:** Plug the shoreline cord into the correct receptacle **only** if the voltage and polarity check correctly, and **be sure to do this every time you set up at a new campground! Always verify the campground voltage and polarity at all sites before plugging in. Trust me!**

Next, go through your RV and plug in all your components and turn on the circuit breakers. If you have a charging converter, measure the DC voltage at the battery bank to verify the voltage increases when the converter is powered up.

Also, be sure to test your GFCI located near your bathroom sink or panel board distribution box to ensure it trips and fully resets. Even if it clicks or snaps, plug the polarity tester into the both the bathroom and exterior receptacles while performing the GFCI tests. These two outlets must be protected by the GFCI. If the circuit is not broken when the test button is pressed, there is no GFCI protection and a replacement or repair is necessary.

5. Clean out your fresh water system

Add a few gallons of fresh water to your water tank if you used the dry method of winterizing. Otherwise, start by draining the antifreeze in the tank and throughout the system. (RV antifreeze can be reused, so you could collect it at the tank drain or at the hot and cold low points if you want.) Next, add fresh water to the tank then drain and refill until all the antifreeze is gone. Continue to fill and flush with fresh water until you are happy with the taste and smell.

Take a look at the filter or strainer in your fresh water system, and clean or replace if necessary. It may be also be connected to the water pump or installed anywhere in line between the tank and the pump.

Once you have filled your waste tank, remove the water heater from the bypass so that fresh water can be pumped through the faucets. Then, turn on the faucets and begin pumping water throughout the system.

At your water heater, open your P&T relief valve to aid in filling. When water begins gushing through the relief valve, close the lever. When water starts flushing through your faucets, close them all. It may take a short time to get rid of the antifreeze and fill your water heater. Also, flush your toilet a few times and run fresh water through any outdoor showers or faucets. In fact, every component that uses fresh water should be checked and flushed.

Now, connect the fresh water hose to the city water connection and turn off the water pump. Inspect all your pipes for leaks now that you've got city pressure hooked up. If you do not find a leak, disconnect the city water pressure. Finally, open the P&T relief valve once more until it stops dripping. You may also want to chlorinate the system if you find foul or stale smelling or tasting water. Most city water has enough chlorine however.

Travel Apps

Have you ever been on vacation wanting to explore the area but not knowing where you are, what's around you, and the best places to go? Now you can have access to information about anything and everything near you right at your fingertips. These are some of the top travel apps available on your smartphone.

Musement- This app uses your phone's location to find the nearest museums, art exhibits, and sightseeing tours right from your RV or campground. The app also allows you to purchase advance tickets to certain attractions that you would normally have to wait in line for. Finding things to do that the whole family would be interested in can be a challenge but with an app like Musement, a list of fun activities is in the palm of your hand.

World Around Me - Similar to the Musement app, the World Around Me app, or WAM, uses your phone's location to show you where the nearest attractions are. But, instead of giving you a list of museums and art galleries, WAM uses Google maps to show you where the nearest ATM, restaurant, convenient store, bar or café might be. So as you are traveling down the highway, you realize you're hungry but you're not sure what type of food lies ahead at the next stop, you can use this app to determine whether to stop for food in the next town or try your luck down the road. Or, say you run out of supplies to make smores, you can use the app to find the nearest convenience store so you don't miss out on your favorite campfire snack.

WAZE- Imagine driving down the highway at 70 mph, all of a sudden traffic comes to a dead stop without warning, and you just passed the last exit for at least 30 miles. All you can think is "great, now we'll be stuck here for hours, if only we had some kind of warning."

Traffic issues can come out of nowhere, but with the WAZE app, you can avoid the headache of having to sit in bumper to bumper traffic while traveling this year. This app is deemed the "world's largest community based traffic and navigation app". It uses real time to warn you of alerts on the road. Whether it be stopped or excessive traffic, speed traps, or even dangerous weather conditions. Users upload to the app using their Smartphone in the event of a traffic incident they encounter while driving so that other users can be prepared. This app will give you plenty of warning so you have time to alter your travel route to avoid any traffic tie-ups.

Glympse- Once you figure out what attractions you want to see, and how you are going to get there, it's time to have fun. Attractions such as amusement parks are popular places to visit while on a family vacation. But let's say Billy wants to ride on the Tunnel of Terror and Sara wants to ride the tea cups, so you split up and agree to meet up back by the snack shack. 2 hours later, Dad and Billy still aren't back and you're left wondering where they could be.

With the Glympse app you can keep track of family members and their whereabouts without having to make frantic phone calls and text messages. All you have to do is plug in the contact you want to see and it will use their phone's location to show you where they are at. It gives you an idea if they are still standing in line waiting for a ride, or making their way back to the meeting spot. It's a great way to keep track of large groups as well.

RV Checklist - Did we lower the antenna? Are the stabilizers still down? Did we get chair back from the neighbor? Never forget these things again. The RV Checklist application is meant to be used by anyone with an RV so that whatever they come with, they leave with and make sure that they don't forget anything that is meant to be remembered! This app is customizable and allows you to better prepare for trips and track your progress toward completing your list. It's very simple and intuitive to use. Don't leave home without it.

Trip Journal - Trip Journal is a great app that does very much what its name implies. The app offers a journal for your travels where you can add photos, thoughts, and map pin points to create an all-around virtual scrapbook of your travels. You can add your favorite attractions, restaurants, or rest stops along the way. Video is also supported so if you were able to get some great footage of the Grand Canyon then you can add it to your travelogue as well. What you get in the end with Trip Journal

are one-of-a-kind travel journals handcrafted by you, rich with your travel experience and full of great travel memories captured for many years to come that you can share anytime and anywhere. If you keep journals for your trips this is certainly the app for you.

GasBuddy - The GasBuddy RV app allows the user to find the cheapest fuel prices while traveling which is made more important for RV'ers as many are filling up gas tanks that are slightly larger than the 12 gallon tank on my neighbors Ford Focus. The reality is that in some areas of the US you will find discrepancies in fuel pricing fluctuate by \$0.30 a gallon or more in the same area. GasBuddy is designed to help.

Free WiFi Finder (Apple) and Free Zone WiFi (Android) - If you haven't considered these apps by now you may want to. The free Wi-Fi apps are a fantastic way to scan your local area for Wi-Fi connections and sort out which are free and which are not. If you use the Apple iTunes version it actually keeps an offline record on your phone of all the known free Wi-Fi areas in the country. This can be an incredible tool while on the road or at your favorite camp site.

These apps, among others, were created to help ease the chaos that can surround us while traveling and vacationing. In a tech savvy world, we can do anything to make being away from home easier just by using our smartphones.

Geocaching in California

Have you ever wanted to play out your childhood fantasy of going on a real life treasure hunt and search for buried treasure? How about following a map leading you to where "X" marks the spot? Well, now you can! Have you ever heard of Geocaching? It's the latest craze in outdoor adventure around the world and is fun for a group of friends or your family to participate in together.

So what exactly is Geocaching? It was started by a GPS enthusiast in May of 2000, when the government announced its newest technology using the Earth's satellites to locate pinpointed targets. Computer consultant Dave Ulmer came up with the idea of hiding a target in the woods of Beaver Creek, Oregon and posting the coordinates on a public website for interested parties to locate using their new GPS systems. He called the event the "Great American GPS Stash Hunt". Within a few days, a dozen people had responded and logged onto the website and posted about their treasure hunt experience. Ever since then, the experience of Geocaching has grown.

How does it work? When you are ready to start your hunt, go to the Geocache website, www.geocaching.com, and plug in your zip code. A list of Geocache hunts will pop up in your area. Pick the one(s) you want to participate in and you'll enter the coordinates of the item into your GPS device. Follow your GPS until you locate the item on the Geocache list. Make sure you look high and low and for things big and small. Depending on the person's interests, the Geocache item can be as small as a 35mm film container, to the size of a large bucket. Once you've found the item, post in the log book about your experience and move on to the next game on your list.

When can you hunt for items? Anytime you want! Geocaches are always popping up as more and more people want to join in the action. There are only a couple rules to abide by. If you remove a Geocache item from its location you must put it back before moving on. Or, if you decide to take the item, replace it with something of equal or greater value. Trackables can be found at some Geocache sites. These are items that you are allowed to take and be placed at the next Geocache site. They have specific codes that can be logged onto the Geocache website where you

can track its travels. For more information on Trackables, visit the Geocache website.

Sound like fun yet?! Geocaching is a modern day fun and exciting treasure hunt for the whole family or group of friends to enjoy. It can also take you to places around your area that you may not regularly visit and gets you out exploring your own home town. Some state parks are even hosting Geocache hunts. For a complete list of events in your area visit the Geocache website.

Keep Our Parks Beautiful

Every year, thousands of state parks across the country organize cleanup efforts to help keep our parks beautiful. It's important to take care of our parks and campgrounds because it can help the environment, help improve property values in the area, attract tourists which can stimulate the local economy, and promote a sense of community through a variety of recreational activities. If we don't do our part to keep the outdoors beautiful, we may not have many places left to go.

Park officials are always looking for volunteers to help with cleanup efforts. Here are a few volunteer events in your area that you can participate in.

Vogel State Park- Blairsville, GA

Vogel state park is the oldest state park in Georgia. It sits at the base of Blood Mountain in Chattahoochee National Forest along a 22 acre lake. Vogel State Park officials are looking for volunteers to help with their Lakeside trail cleanup on Feb 25th from 1-4pm. The only cost you'll have is for parking. They are also hosting a Campground cleanup on March 11th from 1-4pm.

Pine Mountain Trail Work Day

FD Roosevelt state park in Pine Mountain, GA is looking for volunteers to help with trail and campsite cleanup along the Pine Mountain Trail. The workday will be held Saturday, February 21st. Cost is free. Organizers just ask that you bring a trash bag to help with the efforts.

For a list of other volunteer workdays in your area, visit www.georgiastateparks.org/events. While you are traveling this year, consider pitching in at a cleanup event near you and do your part to help keep our parks beautiful.

Other ways you can pitch in is to pick up your campsite before leaving. Make sure all your trash is collected from your campground and disposed of properly in designated trash receptacles at the campgrounds. Also, take along a plastic bag while you are hiking or biking the trails. If you see trash along the way, pick it up, using rubber or latex gloves of course, and take it back with you to your campsite to dispose of later. Every little bit of trash picked up helps keep our parks beautiful!

Camping Accessories to Have On Hand

Whether you are planning to take any camping trips in the spring or not, now is a great time to start thinking about the supplies you might need. There can be a lot to consider when going on an RV trip, and it's easy to forget something important. Here is a selection of a few items you should remember to bring along, especially as the weather starts getting warmer.

The necessity of a first aid kit it is something on which most everyone can agree. You'll want to be prepared for minor accidents or treatable injuries. This is especially true when you are a long way from home. The further away you are from the nearest doctor, the more essential a first aid kit becomes. It can give you peace of mind knowing that you'll be able to take care of minor incidents. It's important to make sure the first aid kit is well-stocked with all the basic items, and has enough supplies to accommodate your group. The Deluxe Travel First Aid Kit from Total Resources is a 237 piece set that comes with everything you need, including bandages, tape, burn cream and ointments.

As we get into warmer weather, especially in the woods or at a campground, the need to have a good insect repellent becomes clear. It goes beyond insect sprays, which is ideal for people who have sensitive skin. RV Upgrades offers a variety of repellants that do not come in direct contact with your skin, such as citronella candles and mosquito coils. These items help deter flying insects from invading your space.

Having a good supply of water with you when you travel is important no matter what the time of year. The warmer it gets, the greater this need becomes, especially since you'll be doing more activities outside. Obviously sugar filled drinks and sodas are not going to take care of your thirst the way water does. You can use a water container to store fresh water, in the event that there is not a supply available. Water containers also make it easy to carry the water where you need it. For larger quantities, Reliance Aqua-Trainer can hold up to 7 gallons, and is made from material that is safe for drinking water. If you want to store a smaller amount, Coghlan's has a 2 gallon container that has the added bonus of being collapsible when empty. Water containers can also come in handy for outdoor entertaining, or in home emergency situations.

Rainy days are common in the springtime, and can also be frequent in the summer, depending on the climate. It's a good idea to have forms of indoor entertainment with you, especially if you are bringing kids along. Indoor games are a great alternative to computers and TVs. Card games can easily pass the time, and an indoor dart set can provide a good distraction. As an example, the Prime Products Dart Board rolls up when you don't need it, and uses magnetic darts to avoid the hazards of sharp tips.

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A checklist for spring RV maintenance

Spend some time now keeping things in order to avoid any surprises during the camping season. Use this spring checklist to ensure a trouble-free RVing season.

Most of the tasks listed below will not require many tools or skills; however, safe practices need to be followed in some areas.

Exterior

- Check roof vents, skylights and accessories like the air conditioner, solar panels or satellite dish for damage.
- Check all roof sealants for signs of deterioration like cracking or lifting.
- Check all other exterior components like windows, moldings, access doors and compartments to ensure a proper watertight seal.
- Lubricate all locks and hinges with a good-quality dry silicone spray.
- Operate any slide-outs to test for proper function and inspect the slide-outs' seal condition. Lubricate the slide-out mechanism with a dry lubricant for slide-outs.
- Check exterior metal or fiberglass siding for any punctures or delamination.
- Extend the awning to check the fabric condition for signs of damage, mold or mildew.
- A good exterior wash is advisable to remove dirt, grime and other contaminants. There are many chemicals, cleaners and protectants available to further enhance the finish of your RV and add resale value in the future.

Electrical

- The use of safety glasses and gloves is advised when working around a 12-volt battery. Be careful when lifting six-volt batteries.
- Check the 12-volt battery for proper fluid levels and follow up with a specific gravity/load test. These procedures can be done at your local RV or auto service center.
- Inspect cables for damage or corrosion.
- Clean the terminals and add some dielectric grease to the posts.
- Ensure proper polarity has been used. (If black and white are used, black is positive. If red and black are used, then black is negative.)
- Check the shore power cord and plug for signs of damage from rodents.
- Clean the blades on the plug with steel wool.
- Ensure the 110-volt hot water heater element is off before plugging the unit in.
- Test the ground fault interrupter (GFI) plugs. A plug tester for this procedure is available at your local retailer.

Propane

- It is advisable to contact your local RV service center and have a timed pressure drop and LPG regulator lockup test done on your RV to ensure proper operation of the LPG supply components and a leak-free piping system.
- Check the date stamps on the LPG tanks. They will need to be re-valved or replaced after 10 years of service.

- Ensure the appliances are turned off before turning the tanks on, and check to see that the LPG detector is functioning.
- Turn on the tanks and check for leaks with soapy water. If you smell propane, shut the tanks off and determine where the propane is leaking from. If the problem is discovered and solved with confidence, then proceed.
- Light a stove burner first to purge the air out, then operate all the appliances to check for proper sequences of operation.

Tires, wheels and undercarriage

- Always ensure a safe work area is provided with the use of wheel chocks and properly rated jack stands. Only work with a level and hard surface when inspecting these components.
- Check the tires' sidewalls and treads for signs of cracking or separation.
- Inflate the tires and torque the wheel lugs to the manufacturer's specifications.
- Check shackles, U-bolts and springs for any signs of damage or excessive wear.
- Check the wheel bearings for excessive end play and consider a wheel bearing repack at least after every second season.
- Check the breakaway switch function.
- Check brake function and adjust if required.

Many RV dealerships offer a bearing repack service, during which all the above-mentioned components will be checked and adjusted. If you are unsure of the procedures and do not feel confident with the tasks, call your local RV service center for a quote.

Water and waste systems

- Ensure that the water heater bypass valves are in the summer position.
- Check the anode rod if a Suburban hot water tank is provided. Replace the rod if over 70 per cent of the material is missing.
- Use the water pump or city water to remove the non-toxic antifreeze from the water pipes.
- After the water heater has filled, turn off the water to remove pressure. Open the pressure and temperature relief valve located on the outside of the water heater and drain the water until the flow stops; close the valve, then provide water pressure once again. This will create an expansion space within the water heater to cure a weeping pressure and temperature relief valve.

Tow vehicles and motorhomes

Additionally, a check-over of the tow vehicle or motorhome chassis is advised. Inspection of the hitch components, 12-volt electrical plugs and brake control function should be done on the tow vehicle, and in the case of the motorhome all fluid levels in the transmission, power steering pump, brake reservoir, radiator, etc. should be checked and filled to the manufacturer's specifications. Depending on the mileage or hours of use with the generator, the oil and filters should be changed as well.

Accessories For Freshening Up Your RV Interior

RV-ing in the winter can be a messy business. Salt, snow, mud and other types of dirt and grime can easily get tracked inside. On the other hand, you may want to start preparing for a spring cleaning after your RV has been in storage. You've certainly heard the term 'spring cleaning' in reference to your home. Your RV benefits from this as well, especially if you have any early spring trips coming up. Whether you are already thinking about getting your RV ready for spring, or if you've done some winter traveling and wish to do a thorough cleaning, these RV accessories will come in handy.

The carpets and floors are definitely an area that can accumulate a lot of dirt, especially if you haven't kept up with maintaining them. There are several brooms and dust pans that can take care of smaller messes on hard floors, such as the Thetford Stormate Expanding Broom. However, for a deeper clean that can extend to carpets and upholstery, the RV central vacuum system from Dirt Devil can be a big help. It catches 99.97% of small particles, and comes with several attachments that allow you to clean almost anywhere, including under seats. The Dirt Devil's versatility allows it to be used on multiple surfaces and materials, from carpets to ceramic tile to vinyl floors.

To get rid of spots or basic stains that are on different surfaces, there are many types of cleaners than can assist in this task. These cleaners are perfect for detail cleaning or wiping down surfaces, such as those found in the kitchen and bathroom areas. They can be useful for cleaning around your dash as well. All-surface cleaners are great for wiping down a variety of surfaces, which can certainly save you time and effort. For more specialized jobs, cleaners for upholstery and fabric, ceramic tile or kitchen and bath surfaces can help you remove spots of dirt, smudges or fingerprints to keep things looking like new. If you've noticed any mold or mildew forming in spots while the RV was in storage, ForceField MoldBlock gets rid of the mold, while also laying down a protective barrier to prevent future growth.

When air quality is the issue, there are deodorizers available from Biocide Systems and 3X Chemistry that can draw in foul smelling elements to clear the air. In a similar vein, Kanberra Gel is made to remove mold and mildew particles from the air. While these products are most useful when the RV is in storage, they are not limited to storage protection. Mold and mildew can also be a result when there is too much moisture in the air. Eva-Dry dehumidifiers come in different sizes to take care of drawing in moisture from whatever size space you have. This is especially helpful in bathroom areas or enclosed spaces where moisture can easily collect.

Camping Accessories That Provide Added Convenience

When you are on an RV trip, certain things come into play that don't pertain to other types of vacations or excursions. RV camping is a unique experience, with many different types of supplies to make the trip easier and more enjoyable for everyone. When it comes to basic camping items,

ease of use, storage space and of course, safety, are all important factors.

When entertaining outside, even at home, more enjoyment can be found when drinks and snacks stay within easy reach. This can be easily taken care of with outdoor tables, of course. However there are other solutions that can achieve this goal, which comes in handy when all the tables are taken. To that end, items such as the Camco Tippy Stix Beverage Holder and the Prime Products Clip On Cup Holder can hold the food or drinks right where someone is sitting. This certainly beats having to hold it in your hand or lap, or putting it on the ground! The Tippy Stix Holder stakes into the ground and can accommodate different sizes of glasses or bowls at different heights. The Clip On Holder works with almost any A-Frame chair, giving you an instant side table! When it comes to cleaning up spills or messes, you can keep paper towels within easy reach with the EZ-Roll Paper Towel Holder. The bungee style cords clip onto almost anything, so the paper towel roll can be placed anywhere that's convenient and won't blow away.

Its been mentioned here many times how important storage space is and to consolidate it whenever possible. Collapsible objects can solve this issue easily, while making a picnic or camping trip go more smoothly. When you have food set outside and you want to keep insects, leaves or other debris off of it, food covers are a great way to go. They are perfect if you have buffet style eating when everyone gets what they want whenever they wish, or when your meal is ready but not everyone is ready to eat the same time. Ming Mark offers several different food cover sets that come in different sizes and are all collapsible for easy storage. There are even insulated versions that can keep the food that the temperature you want for a longer period. If you have trash or recycling, its easy to divide the two with collapsible containers. The recycling bin even has separate areas for bottles, cans and paper. Camco also has an extra-large size bin that is perfect for larger groups, or even for use at home for collecting yard waste.

Lastly, in the event that someone gets separated from the group, there are items that can help keep them comfortable and make them easier to find. Camco has an emergency blanket as well as a poncho that are both made to keep out the wind and rain. They also work to keep in body heat. The highly reflective material will make them more noticeable. For general use, Camco's rain poncho can keep you dry when inclement weather unexpectedly pops up. It's also a great thing to have along if you plan on spending any time away from the vicinity of your motorhome.

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