Gear test: Damage Control Kit

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Whether taking a family cruise on the bay or spending the day fishing offshore, there is one thing that will certainly put a damper on your outing: water entering your boat quicker than your pumps can discharge it overboard.

It can come from a leaking through-hull fitting, a broken transducer, a ruptured hose, a stuffing box out of adjustment or even a crack in the hull. Regardless of the source of the leak, the difference between an inconvenience and a tragedy is being prepared to quickly deal with the situation, which means having a few basic tools and supplies on hand.

As with many things, experience is a great teacher, and Barry Kallander, founder of SeaKits in Bolton, Mass., has Navy submarine service to thank for his introduction to flooding control. That background, along with years of yachting, guided Kallander in assembling the SeaKits Damage Control Kit.

This is a comprehensive, self-contained "off the shelf" kit that has been assembled with the goal of providing the basic tools, materials and guidance that should allow boaters to deal with leaks and flooding. There are plugs, wedges, patches, fasteners and tools within the kit's orange water-resistant dry box. The provided guidebook alone is a valuable resource.

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Simply reading the contents list of the dry box doesn't do justice to the quality of the Damage Control Kit. Every component is well-thought-out, of excellent quality, and provided by reputable manufacturers. There would be numerous ways of shaving cost from the kit by providing lesser-quality products, but Kallander didn't cut corners.

Here's a brief rundown of the contents. In the removable tray is a Buck Knives camp axe with a weighted head, used for splitting the included wedges and driving the wedges and plugs into breaches, such as through-hulls, seacocks and hoses. The Buck Knives folding saw should be used for sizing wedges and cutting hose or other materials. A Davis Instruments stainless steel Yachtsman's Knife can be used to cut patch material, lines and the like, and includes a shackle key and marlinspike. The Fulton floating flashlight comes with batteries (not installed). An Ideal flexible hose clamp driver, Scotch duct tape, self-amalgamating silicone sealing tape, and a tube of steel-reinforced sealing putty round out the top tray contents.

In the main part of the box are 10 stainless steel hose clamps from 3/4- to 7-inch diameter, all neatly secured together. There is a 1-pound bag of oakum for filling split seams or shaft seals (it expands when wet); tapered softwood plugs; softwood wedges; a thin copper sheet for temporary electrical repairs; POW-R WRAP pipe repair kits for 1/2- to 4-inch pipe; a POW-R PATCH water-activated, resin-impregnated fiberglass patch; epoxy putty for repairing fuel tanks, heat exchangers, pumps, etc.; a neoprene rubber sheet and plywood backing block for shoring up hull or tank breaches; split fire hose and tarred marlin for repairing pipe splits; and Ancor wire ties.

Everything fits nicely in the dry box and is easily accessible. In addition to the descriptions of the kit components, the guidebook includes bilge pump capacity and flooding-rate charts, blank diagrams for through-hull locations, a good explanation of flooding and damage control, a product use guide, and a listing of typical failure points and damage control techniques. The guide, of course, isn't intended to replace hands-on training, but it will help familiarize you with preparing for and hopefully preventing flooding casualties. Everything in the kit seems to be there for good reason, and it is worth taking the time to read the guide.

Over the years, I have managed to assemble my own damage control kit, with contents similar to those in the SeaKits product. While most of the items are on board, I am certain that I couldn't easily put my hands on all of them at once, especially in an emergency situation. And some of the supplies may have been exhausted and not replenished. I like the idea of being able to direct someone to the "orange box under the helm" in an emergency, knowing that almost everything necessary to control flooding will be there.

SeaKits has done a good job in providing a valuable, quality product at a reasonable cost. The Damage Control Kit sells for $295 and is available at *www.seakits.com*. The company can be contacted at (978) 779-5211. ■

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