

Practical projects

Great ideas and tips from PBO readers

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Down the pan

No-one should be pumping out the heads in a harbour. But what's the alternative to fitting a holding tank? John Boulcott provides one answer

We're all becoming more aware of the detrimental effects that pollution is having on our environment, and about the undesirable practice of pumping raw sewage from sea toilets into anchorages, rivers and harbours.

The recommended solution is to fit a holding tank to your boat, but finding space to fit such a tank – especially in smaller boats – is difficult and sometimes impossible.

My solution that finds a way around this is to make use of bags, the type of thing used in commode chairs and bedpans.

In our Hunter Pilot sailing yacht my wife and I use Abena Abri-Bag liners: they are supplied in boxes of 20 and work out at just over 50p per bag.

The liner fits perfectly around the rim of the toilet bowl and comes with an absorbent gel pad which will absorb up to 600ml of urine.



The bags are very hygienic and easy to use, and are sealed after use by means of a built-in drawstring.

Bedpan liner with absorbent pad fits perfectly inside the heads

The bags can then be securely double bagged and disposed of in your

household waste bin – as would a child's nappies – when ashore.

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Low cost waste holding tank

Stuart Guy's simple gravity solution for converting existing sea toilets

We all need to rethink the way we use our sea toilets in coastal and harbour locations for the sake of the environment and other water users, but the cost of conversion to a holding tank with an electric pump out can be prohibitive for boat owners on a budget.

Here's a simple alternative I set to my Hunter Pilot 27 works well and is easy to install. The existing sea



Reader Stuart Guy found room in his Hunter Pilot 27 to install a simple gravity-fed holding tank system – see PBO Summer 2022



Pack of absorbent Abri-Bag bedpan liners is a cheap and simple alternative to installing a holding tank, says John Boulcott

Untangling a halyard

David Mead puts a spanner in the works to create a weighty solution for freeing tangled mast lines

Have you ever had a halyard that has gone forward over the spreaders and been trapped around something – in our case usually either be the radar reflector or the mast steaming light – on the front of the mast so it can't easily be flicked free?

It has happened to us several times, usually when the line isn't tight because we're not quite ready to raise the main and the wind is from astern.

The problem is that the line can't be freed off when it is over the spreaders by simply flicking it, yet can be raised

and lowered but can't take the sail up beyond where the line is forward of the track.

My favourite solution, if the line can at least go up and down, is to undo the mainsail end of the halyard and attach a retrieval line and as much weight in as compact a form as possible.

The weights need to be as compact as possible to be able to get completely over the spreaders on both occasions forward and backwards without catching, and also heavy enough to overcome the friction of the halyard blocks. We use a

collection of heavy sockets and spanners tied together in a bunch.

Next is to raise the halyard up and over the spreaders, then stop and let the weights swing over and bring the halyard down forward of the spreaders as I release the halyard carefully – we don't want to break anything on the foredeck with our weights by letting them drop carelessly.

When it is all down and within reach it is usually fairly easy to flick the line free of the obstacle on the front of the mast.

Once free, the retrieval line and main halyard are pulled until everything is back above the spreaders, then the halyard is released and the retrieval line pulled to bring the halyard and its weights down back over the spreaders when it is reattached to the mainsail and the weights and extra line removed. Then we can sail on.

Pre-emptive move

To prevent this happening in the first case we now maintain tension on the main halyard while the main sail is yet to be raised by using a strong elastic band to hold it down to a convenient cleat situated below the boom.

The idea here is that, when we decide to raise the sail, pulling the halyard hard soon breaks the elastic band which falls away and allows the line and sail to go up. The only problem is that we need plenty of spare, strong elastic bands. A more proactive solution would be to fit a line above the spreaders from one stay line across ahead of the mast to the other side one, thus preventing the problem in the first case – but that requires someone who likes climbing masts, and that is definitely not me!

LEFT Halyards sometimes get caught on David Mead's masthead light and radar reflector



Airtight flare container serves as a 'holding tank'

Advantages of using the bags:

- Avoids the effort and expense of plumbing in a holding tank to your existing toilet installation
- No need to sail three miles offshore to empty your tank when full, or to search for marina pump-out facilities
- You are not limited to how long you can stay in an anchorage, provided you have enough bags with you
- Toilet paper and wet wipes can just be popped into the bag
- Toilet doesn't require flushing and the pan and pipes remain clean
- Heads stays nice and fresh and odour free

The only issue for some people may be how and where on the boat to store the used bags before going ashore.

We use an empty flare container (the holding tank!) which we keep in the cockpit locker. The container incorporates a very good airtight seal and the boat remains free of odours.

