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## Cleaning Care and Maintenance of Common Marine Fabrics

Cleaning and caring for Marine Fabrics involves more than just hosing down surfaces and scraping off the stray barnacle; it takes time and effort. Presented here by [Herculite Inc.](#) is a white paper on how to properly take care of and maintain common marine fabrics.

First, let's define what we mean by common marine fabrics. Simply put, common marine fabrics are those textiles used in marine furniture, covers, and shade structures. Such textiles include but are not limited to canvas, vinyl, acrylic, and polyester materials. Here's a quick list of some common types of marine fabrics and some of the qualities they feature:

- *Vinyl*: This material (also known as polyvinyl chloride) is very commonly used in marine fabric upholstery. The material is great because it is waterproof, resists mildew, mold, and can in many cases contain anti-microbial chemicals. It's a cost-effective choice for marine fabrics.
- *Vinyl and Polyester Composite*: The composite fabric can stay tight on the frame and provides waterproof and mildew resistance as well. [Herculite Inc.](#) offers this composite in two marine fabric choices: [Riviera](#) and [Regatta](#). These fabrics are waterproof and mildew resistant.
- *Polypropylene*: This material, also known as polyolefin, is odor and stain resistant, and offers high wicking properties.
- *Acrylic*: This material is a woven fabric that is naturally ultra violet ray resistant. It is also mildew, moth, oil, and chemical resistant.

More than likely, your watercraft's furniture/upholstery or dodger is made from a common marine fabric. This means that you have a variety of options in how you can care for, clean, and maintain your marine fabric. But before you start scrubbing, you need to consider how and where you use your boat. Do you have a shade cover or enclosure panels for your deck? Do you go out on freshwater or seawater? How often do you use your boat?

Why are the above questions important to consider? For starters, the type of cleaning solutions and how often you need to care for your boat depends on whether or not you're protecting your upholstery from the elements. Or if you sail in saltwater, this can erode your watercraft's fabrics faster than you might think. Also, if you use your boat often, then you will want to clean it more than just once every few months.

Even if your marine fabric is chemically treated or naturally mildew and mold resistant, this doesn't mean your fabric will remain that way forever. What this means is that you will have to take care of it so that the fabric doesn't deteriorate to a point where mildew and mold can grow. Also, if not properly cared for, marine fabrics are more susceptible to tearing and fading.



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## ***General Marine Fabric Upholstery Care & Maintenance Tips***

So how can you properly clean your marine fabric? Here are some suggestions on how to clean and care for marine fabric upholstery/furniture like Herculite's Regatta or Riviera fabrics. First, remember to hose your boat down with clean water. Avoid using abrasive cleaning cloths and don't use detergents. One extra, very important thing to remember is that your hands are also clean while working on your boat; you don't want to spread sunscreen or other harmful chemicals on your marine fabric while you clean.

You will also want to purchase specially formulated cleaning solutions for boat/marine fabrics. Contact your local canvas shop or boat store for a good list of cleaning supplies. Remember, never ever use ammonia, bleach, or abrasive soaps directly on your marine fabric; this can damage or discolor the surface of your marine fabric. If you choose to use bleach you will want to make a solution.

If you choose not to use a pre-made solution or cleaning kit purchased from a store or manufacturer, then you can always make a cleaning solution of your own by using a mild soap like Woolite or Dawn and water. When cleaning vinyl marine fabric routinely remember to do the following:

- Try to clean your boat's fabrics every few weeks when it's not in storage.
- Brush off any dirt.
- Use mild soap and avoid harsh detergents. Do not use bleach directly; this can deteriorate the fabric and its stitching.
- Use a soft cloth or soft bristle brush or sponge. Never use anything abrasive as it can damage the surface of the fabric.
- Once you're done cleaning the vinyl, wipe the soapy solution off the fabric using clean water and a soft cloth.
- Then rinse until all soapy residue is gone.
- Dry your vinyl with a soft material. Do not use heat to dry as this can also damage your marine fabric.

For stain or mildew removal, use specially formulated solutions that you can purchase at your boat shop or online. Remember, don't scrub your boat's vinyl with anything abrasive as this can scratch the surface. If you choose to use your own solution to clean tough stains try doing the following:

- Prepare a solution of 1 cup bleach and ¼ cup of mild detergent per gallon of clean water. (Check with your canvas shop to see what they recommend for a cleaning solution to be sure).
- Soak the affected area in this solution for 15 minutes.



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- Remove the stain with a sponge or clean towel.
- Rinse thoroughly with clear water to remove all the soapy residue.
- Air dry.

You can also apply fabric protecting solutions like 303 High Tech Fabric Guard to your marine fabric. You can also hire a professional cleaner to maintain your boat.

If you're cleaning and the marine fabric wrinkles, do not use a steamer or iron set to steam. Rather, use an iron on synthetic setting. Remember to test the iron on a small area of the fabric before ironing the whole thing.

If you choose to hand wash your marine fabric – boat covers, seat covers, cushion covers – then here are some handy tips:

- Soak the fabric in a solution of ¼ cup of mild detergent per gallon of lukewarm water.
- Use a sponge or soft bristle brush if needed to remove light stains.
- Rinse thoroughly to ensure soapy residue has been removed completely.
- Air dry.

However, if you want to machine wash your upholstery fabrics (not your boat cover) you can try the following:

- Machine wash in cold water. Depending on the load size, use normal amounts of mild laundry detergent and add 8 ounces of bleach if desired.
- Allow the fabric to air dry.

### ***Boat Cover and Tops Maintenance and Care Tips***

If you own Sunbrella fabric marine tops and covers, here are some tips and advice on how to care for them:

- Do not fold and store a wet cover.
- Always use a mild detergent such as Woolite or Dawn dishwashing liquid.
- Water should be cold to lukewarm.
- Rinse thoroughly to remove all detergent residues.
- Never apply heat to Sunbrella fabrics.
- Air dry only.
- Remove loose dirt often.
- Hose down.



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- Use a soft bristle brush to clean and allow cleaning solution to soak into the fabric.

Another thing to keep in mind when cleaning and caring for your Sunbrella fabric is how to apply 303 High Tech Fabric Guard. According to Sunbrella you should apply 303 after each thorough cleaning; this is because cleaning typically removes the original finish and reduces the fabric's water repellency. Here's some tips on how to apply the 303 product:

- Clean Sunbrella fabric as mentioned above.
- Allow Sunbrella fabric to completely air dry.
- Apply 303 Fabric Guard in a well ventilated area following instructions on the container.
- Apply 303 in a thin even coat and allow fabric to dry completely.
- Apply a second thin, even coating of 303. (Two light coatings are more effective in restoring fabric water resistance than a single heavy coating. A 15-ounce bottle provides coverage of up to 50 square feet of fabric).

If you happen to own **Nautex Seamaster** and **Yachtmaster** fabric boat covers for your boat then here are some tips recommended by the manufacturer:

- Never fold and store the cover when wet.
- Never use any kind of additional plastic foil to cover the boat. This can cause moisture through condensation water.
- Avoid cooking underneath the cover! Cooking steam contains microorganisms which can act like fertilizer for mildew to grow
- Ventilate regularly. Consider ventilation flaps already in the design and manufacture of the boat cover.
- Remove loose dirt regularly.
- Never clean the cover with high pressure cleaners.
- Never clean the cover in a washing machine.

### ***Marine Enclosure Panels made of Pressed Polished Clear Vinyl:***

If you own marine enclosures made with Strataglass and Crystal Clear 20/20 then the following tips are for you.

- Never use abrasive or high alkaline cleaners on any clear vinyl product.
- Don't use a wash and wax product on Strataglass.
- Don't use Rain-X, Pledge, or Plexus on either Crystal Clear 20/20 or Strataglass.



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- Do not leave cleaners on Clear Vinyl for long periods. Rinse with cold to lukewarm, clean water right away.
- Don't apply cleaners in direct sunlight or when it's hot.
- Never use sharp objects, squeegees, razors, brushes, scrapers or paper towels on clear vinyl, you can damage the surface.
- Never use: acetone, petrol, benzene, or solvents containing Butyl Cellosolve or Isopropanol.
- Use generous amounts of lukewarm water to rinse sheet and soften dried dirt.
- Make up a solution of lukewarm water and a mild dishwashing detergent or a mild soap, and use this to wash sheets; a sponge or soft cloth should be used to gently remove dirt and grime.
- Rinse with clean cold or lukewarm water and repeat washing if necessary.
- After final rinse dry off with a soft cloth to reduce water spotting.
- Finally, never store your clear vinyl rolled up when wet.

Cleaning and caring for your marine fabrics takes a lot of time and effort but it's well worth it; after all your boat is an investment. For more detailed cleaning and maintenance instructions for your watercraft's specific fabric, contact your manufacturer and ask them for a guide.

For care and instruction of Herculte Inc. Marine Fabrics contact us at [www.herculte.com](http://www.herculte.com).