

# Ask Steve

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**Steve,**

I have read your articles in Cruising World for years and have found them very informative.

Recently I notice that the data in Defender and West Marine catalogs refer to the plugs on seacocks as Drain plugs. While in my older maintenance manuals are referred to as lube ports

Should I be lubing these ports yearly, or are they truly drain ports?

Thanks,

Harvey Allen

S/V Serseri, Westerly 34

**Harvey:**

The plugs to which you refer have been variously called drain and grease fittings. On older cone-style seacocks, which required lubrication, the plug served both purposes. Those seacocks relied on a tight, metal to metal fit, which needed lubrication to remain watertight, and to enable the valve cone to be moved easily. Additionally, if the vessel is stored in the water for the winter, the seacocks could be winterized by removing the drain plug when the seacock was in the closed position, allowing water to drain from the void. Failing to do this could result in a frozen, and then cracked seacock, which in turn could lead to flooding. The same plug would be used for grease application, via a zerk fitting and a grease gun, when the valve is open, injecting grease between the

rotating cone and the stationary valve body.

Newer seacocks, those of the ball valve variety, are self-sealing and for the most part self-lubricating; their seals are slippery Teflon or an equivalent non-metallic material, making grease unnecessary. In this case, the plug is primarily for drainage purposes, again during winterization. However, while it's not necessary, grease can be pumped into the void between the valve body and the ball, to reduce the likelihood of corrosion and accumulation of debris, as well as scoring of the ball when barnacles strike on these surfaces.

Grease used for seacocks should be highly viscous and water resistant. In this application, for many years I have used marine trailer wheel bearing grease, it's sticky and extremely tenacious when used in seawater environments. It's longer lasting than Teflon and lithium-based greases.

S D'A

**Steve,**

Enjoy reading your blog and articles. I was wondering if you've ever done an article on "how to keep your engine and engine room clean." I'm sure you don't just spray a hose on everything and hope for the best. What products work best with wiping down the engine, etc.?

Also, thinking about putting in a water maker. Do you have any personal favorites? Our genset finally died a slow death, and rather than go through all that again we maxed out on solar with 800 watts on the boat, plus adding a little more capacity to our battery bank (our previous "new" batteries had to be replaced after only two years). Now we rarely get below 90% on any given day, even with that big 24 v fridge motor

running. It's a great feeling to be energy dependent finally. And we finally have enough power to run a water maker.

Cheers,

Walter Conner

S/V Flying Cloud

Taswell 44

Hailing Port: Seattle, WA

Lying: Iles des Saints, Guadeloupe

**Walter:**

You've posed two very good questions.

You are correct in your suspicions; it's inadvisable to simply blast your engine with a stream of water. My preference is for running the engine to get it warm. After shutting down turn off the main battery switch. Then spray the areas that need cleaning with a good emulsifying cleaner, I have used Spray Nine for years with great results, but there are others. After letting this soak for a few minutes, scrub and wipe areas you can reach with a brush, a pot scrubber works well (avoid the temptation to borrow one from the galley), the long handle allows for better reach. After scrubbing, carefully spray water to rinse, try to avoid directly spraying the starter, alternator, oil pressure sender, air intake (you may want to cover this with tin foil) and obvious electrical connections. The fact is, most of these items can get wet occasionally, they simply aren't designed to endure a stream of water. After rinsing, start and let run to dry off. Your engine is mechanical, which means electronic components are pretty much non-existent. For electronic engines, more caution would be used around the ECM and connections. However, once again, these systems are designed to get wet occasionally, and with a light spray of water. Most of the

electrical components were originally designed for over the road trucking use, where they are exposed to heavy, often salty, road spray.

Where watermakers are concerned, I've had very good results with those from Parker Village Marine Tech. I've visited the facility where they are manufactured in California (they provide water makers for the military, including the US Navy's submarine fleet, whose standards are predictably very high), the quality and attention to detail are both excellent. Alternatively, you could also use a product from Spectra, a well-respected manufacturer that is very popular with sailors. Both offer DC models, which is what I assume you would use aboard your vessel.

S D'A

**Hi Steve,**

Would you be able to venture an opinion as to the state of our u-joint coming off the back of the port main engine? The same joint on the starboard main shows no evidence of grease spewing out like this.

Broken seal maybe? Should this be repaired before we travel any further?

Any ideas?

Thanks,

Captain Mark Vanderbyl

M/V Aurora

**Mark:**

“Leaking” grease from the U joint isn’t necessarily an indication of an impending failure, or even a failed seal. In fact, a U joint that stops slinging grease is often of greater concern. The rule of thumb is you have about a month of daily use after a U joint stops showing a grease sling line.

Has it been greased recently?

The ultimate arbiter of the U joint’s health is temperature; all should operate at roughly the same temperature. If this one is elevated, then that is an indication of a potential problem.

Assuming all other issues are normal, these joints typically need very little in the way of greasing, again, about every six months. The Seatorque system, which uses Spicer U joints, the same or similar to those you have, calls for grease every six months. Grease should be an EP (extreme pressure) NLGI Grade 2. Spicer, a popular manufacturer of U-joints, actually markets their own synthetic grease for U joints, as another option.

S D’A

**Ask Steve questions should be addressed to [asksteve@stevedmarineconsulting.com](mailto:asksteve@stevedmarineconsulting.com). Please include your full name and home port. Concise questions are more likely to be answered.**

**For more information on the services provided by Steve D’Antonio Marine Consulting, Inc. please e mail Steve at [info@stevedmarineconsulting.com](mailto:info@stevedmarineconsulting.com) or call 804-776-0981.**