RV Winterization Checklist

towingmath.com/learn/rv-winterization-checklist/ | Reviewed for 2026 | Tick each box as you go

For storing a towable RV - travel trailer, fifth wheel or camper - through freezing weather. Motorhome engines, chassis and generators follow their own manuals. Where your RV's own manual or a component maker's instructions differ from this list, follow them.

Read these first

- Never put automotive antifreeze or windshield washer fluid in the water system. Automotive antifreeze is ethylene glycol, which is highly toxic.
- Never switch the water heater on while it is empty. Running the electric element with no water in the tank damages it.
- Do not dilute ready-to-use RV antifreeze, and drain the water out first. Water left in the lines dilutes it, and there is no reliable home tester to check.
- Blowing the lines out with air? No more than 30 psi.

Before you start

- [ ] Non-toxic RV antifreeze: 4 to 6 gallons, or 2 if you will blow the lines out with compressed air first.
- [ ] A new water filter cartridge for spring, if your RV has a filter.
- [ ] Your RV's owner's manual and the water heater's manual. Where they differ from this list, they win.

Drain the water system

- [ ] Empty and flush the black and gray holding tanks at a dump station.
- [ ] Turn the water heater off, gas and electric, and let it cool.
- [ ] Remove and discard the water filter cartridge. Use the filter's bypass tube if it has one.
- [ ] Drain the fresh water tank.
- [ ] Open the low-point drains and every faucet, including the outside shower.
- [ ] Hang the shower heads below the diverter so they drain.
- [ ] Drain the water heater: remove its drain plug - on a Suburban heater, the anode rod - and open the pressure-relief valve to let air in.
- [ ] Flush the toilet until no more water comes through.
- [ ] Residential refrigerator with an ice maker: drain its water line. Never put antifreeze in it.
- [ ] Black tank flush inlet: blow it out with air at no more than 30 psi, with the black tank valve open and uncapped, or pump antifreeze into it.

Bypass the water heater and pump in antifreeze

- [ ] Close the low-point drains, faucets and tank drain valve. Refit the water heater drain plug and close its relief valve.
- [ ] Set the water heater bypass valves to BYPASS before any antifreeze goes in.
- [ ] Suburban heater with no bypass: remove the anode rod for the winter and fit a 3/4-inch drain plug before adding antifreeze.
- [ ] Pump winterizing kit: put its pick-up tube in the antifreeze jug and open its valve. No kit: pour at least 4 gallons into the fresh tank.
- [ ] Turn the water pump on.
- [ ] Starting with the faucet farthest from the pump, open the cold side until antifreeze runs, then the hot side.
- [ ] Do the outside shower and the shower heads too - open the diverters.
- [ ] Flush the toilet until antifreeze flows continuously.
- [ ] Washing machine, if fitted: run a cold fill, then a hot fill, until antifreeze appears.
- [ ] Turn the pump off, then open one faucet to relieve the pressure and close it again.

Or blow the lines out with compressed air

Uses about 2 gallons of antifreeze instead of 4 to 6. Do the draining and water heater steps first, with the heater bypassed.

- [ ] Open every faucet, the shower sprayer and the toilet flush valve.
- [ ] Run the water pump for at least 30 seconds to clear it.
- [ ] Fit a blow-out plug to the city water inlet and blow the lines out at no more than 30 psi, until no water comes from any fixture.
- [ ] Then put antifreeze into the drains, P-traps, toilet and holding tanks.

Drains, toilet and holding tanks

- [ ] Every drain trap needs antifreeze. Outdoors RV runs at least about a cup through each faucet; Keystone pours about a quart into each drain and P-trap.
- [ ] Holding tanks: Keystone lets about a quart into the black tank; Forest River pours a gallon down the toilet and a gallon down each gray tank's drain.
- [ ] Leave a little antifreeze in the toilet bowl to keep its seal covered.
- [ ] Close and cap the tank drains, city water inlet, tank flush inlet and fresh water fill.

Close it up for storage

- [ ] Turn off every LP appliance and its gas valve, then the propane valves at the tanks.
- [ ] Empty the refrigerator and freezer and prop their doors open.
- [ ] Lead-acid batteries: fully charged with the electrolyte topped up. Check monthly and recharge at 80% or less - a discharged battery will freeze and crack its case.
- [ ] Lithium batteries: follow the battery maker's storage instructions instead.
- [ ] Battery disconnect off. Switch off all lights, appliances and the water pump.
- [ ] Tires: inflate to their maximum rated cold pressure, cover them, and check them every 30 days.
- [ ] Close and cover the roof vents, and cover the exterior appliance vents against snow and insects. Remove the covers before using the appliances again.
- [ ] Close the windows, curtains and blinds.
- [ ] Generator, if fitted: add a fuel stabilizer, or drain or use up the fuel, and store it as its manual says.
- [ ] Guard against rodents, and check inside now and then for pests, leaks and condensation.
- [ ] Keep the roof clear of snow and ice.

In spring: dewinterizing

- [ ] Check for nests and pests, and remove the vent and appliance covers.
- [ ] Dump the holding tanks and fill the fresh tank with water.
- [ ] Run every faucet and shower - cold side, then hot - until the water runs clear with no pink.
- [ ] Flush the toilet until it runs clear, then dump the tanks again.
- [ ] Sanitize the fresh water system (below) and fit the new water filter.
- [ ] Set the water heater bypass back to normal so the tank fills - and only then turn the heater on.
- [ ] Check every accessible water fitting for leaks.
- [ ] Fresh batteries in the smoke and CO alarms, then test the CO, propane and smoke alarms.
- [ ] Charge and reinstall the batteries, and set the tires to their specified cold pressure.

Sanitizing the fresh water system

1. Mix 1/4 cup of 5% household bleach into a gallon of water. Use one gallon of that mix for every 15 gallons of fresh tank capacity.
2. With the tank empty and every faucet and drain closed, pour it into the fresh tank, then fill the tank with water.
3. Run the pump and open each faucet until the air is purged and water flows, then top the tank up to the fill spout.
4. Leave it to stand for at least 3 hours.
5. Drain through every faucet and the tank drain, flushing with drinking-quality water for several minutes. Refill with water you know is safe to drink.

Example: a 30-gallon fresh tank takes 2 gallons of the mix, which is 1/2 cup of bleach. The 1/4 cup assumes 5% household bleach, as Forest River specifies. Check the strength on your bottle.

Sources - every line above comes from one or more of these:
Forest River - Travel Trailer & Fifth Wheel Owner's Manual (PDF): https://forestriverinc.com/images/forestriverownersmanual-ttfw.pdf
Keystone RV - How to Winterize Your RV with Antifreeze: https://www.keystonerv.com/owners/how-to-winterize-your-rv-with-antifreeze
Outdoors RV - Owner's Manual (2020, PDF), Storage and Winterization: https://outdoorsrvmfg.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ORV-Owners-Manual_2020.pdf
Suburban - Water Heater FAQs: https://suburbanrv.com/service-support/faqs/
Camco - RV Winterizing Instructions brochure (2021, PDF; dealer-hosted copy): https://www.jerrystrailers.com/siteart/pdfs/Camco_Winterizing_Instructions_2021.pdf