

Strippers: A Waiting Game

After picking equivalent areas of boat bottom for testing, I set up a grid to evaluate how well each of the paint removers worked against the bottom paint, Interlux Micron CSC and the epoxy barrier coating, the original 25-year-old Interlux InterProtect, on the hull of my Ericson 41.

I tested 3-, 6-, 12-, 24-, and 36-hour “cook” periods (dwell times), and followed the manufacturer’s recommendations for coverage and sheathing procedures. The Peel Away Paper was used on the Marine Safety Strip and Smart Strip, but the water-based Smart Strip can be used without a covering. Soy Strip, another big player in the eco-friendly, non-toxic paint removal business, is more often than not used without a physical cover. Its gelatinous consistency is intended to keep the surface chemically active for a protracted period. But in my case, mid-Atlantic summer heat tended to bake out the solvents, and the best performance was gained using 1-mil plastic sheeting over the Franmar Soy Strip to keep chemicals active for the prolonged period necessary to loosen the epoxy barrier coat.

Because the project was carried out on a warm day, the heat exacerbated the “dry out” problem. The window of time during which the “peeling edge” of the barrier coat remained soft was very narrow, and a bit-by-bit peel and scrape procedure paid off. As Peel Away Marine Strip’s directions suggested, scraping under the leading edge of the covered surface works best.



A 1-mil sheet of plastic was used to cover the Soy Strip to keep the chemicals from drying out. Peel Away recommends its own paper or regular butcher paper.

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A word of caution: With extended dwell time comes the chance of chemically impacting the gelcoat. In the case of *Wind Shadow's* paint peel, the very first layer of barrier coat had not blistered, and the chemical stripping only needed to get to that layer. A scuff sanding followed to expose the gelcoat in about 50 percent of the surface. If one’s intentions are to chemically remove all coatings external to the gelcoat, careful dwell time testing should be done in small patches to determine just how much chemical reaction the gelcoat will tolerate without softening.