

Do You Get What You Pay For?

Always looking for a price-point advantage, *Practical Sailor* scrutinized non-marine caulking products more often seen in bathrooms than in boatyards. Many of these dual-purpose interior/exterior sealants tend to be modified acrylics meant for home use and trending toward latex formulations rather than a polyurethane or polysulfide base.

In general, they lack the adhesive strength of marine sealants and break down in water over time. They shrink as they cure, and when used in a marine environment, they tend to deteriorate more quickly. Acrylics harden and crack when exposed to extreme heat and the sun's ultraviolet rays. In short, the acrylic portion of the non-marine product list is best left to shoreside use.

Silicones offer a more encouraging outcome, and what we looked at were the 100-percent silicone sealants rather than the modified silicone products that have become homeowner favorites. Sealants like GE Silicone II and Dow Corning's 795 are a match in quality for marine-grade products but with the latter's cost averaging around \$16.50, purchasing and using the non-marine product adds up to less than a 3-percent savings. Off-brand silicone products can be found for considerably less, but the gamble lies in betting that the quality is equivalent.

In our April 1, 2005 and August 2006 reports on waterproof caulks and sealants, testers included several hardware-store brands, including GE Silicone II, Ace Hardware's



Most of the adhesive/sealant bonds are still intact on our five-year-old test panel.

Clear Sealant, and Elmer's Squeeze and Caulk. After a year, all three performed well in the elasticity and waterproofness tests, but the Elmer's and Ace products proved to have better adhesive quality.

The 2005 test panels are still undergoing exposure testing, and after five years, the GE Silicone, Ace, and Elmer's are still intact; however, the Ace silicone we tested is no longer available. (Look for a full update on how all 23 products in that test are faring in a future issue.)

While these non-marine brands are holding their own after a few years, it's hard to say at this point how they will compare over the long haul to the products designed for the marine environment and onboard applications.

The bottom line is that most boating projects that involve sealants and adhesives are labor-intensive endeavors that consume a relatively small amount of caulk. Saving a few dollars by betting on bargain-priced materials can be a foolish gamble, in our opinion. Ending up with an inadequate caulk that prematurely fails negates the value of all the labor invested in the project.

When it comes to caulking, going with the good stuff typically pays off in the long run.