

## Winter RV Camping Tips

*By Marsha Lassen, RV Forum Staff*

A lot of RVers may find themselves winter camping at some point in their RV lives. They may want to spend some cold months camping so they can ski, enjoy the snow, ice fish or avoid the summer crowds. They also may find themselves winter camping due to family emergencies, employment, waiting for a house to be built, just any reason that would keep them in the “below freezing” weather.

Several things may need to be addressed if you want to winter RV camp:

- How to keep your water line from the campground water supply to the RV from freezing.
- How to keep sewer lines from freezing, while on the ground and connected to a sewer disposal connection.
- How to keep your fresh water tank from freezing.
- How best to conserve propane.
- How to supply propane to the RV
- Does under skirting help with heating the RV.
- Other tips.

The best way to keep your external water supply line from freezing is to fill your on board tank and work from that. When the tank gets low, reconnect the water line and refill your tank. Be sure to empty all the water that may remain in the hose so that it doesn't freeze while put away.

The above technique can work well with RVs that have large on board fresh water tanks; but what about those RVs whose tanks aren't so big? One thing that can work is to put “heat tape” on the water supply line. It works best if the heat tape is laid parallel to the water supply line and not wrapped around it. If you wrap it around the supply line, the heat tape can melt itself. I know; I did it once!!

The sewer line should be handled the same way as the fresh water. Use the onboard holding tanks to collect grey and black water. When they are full, connect the sewer line, empty the tanks and put the sewer line away. Some have recommended using the heat tape on the sewer line; but my personal opinion is that it might melt the sewer lines, so I prefer to just empty the tanks and put everything away. As with the water line, be sure the sewer line is completely empty before storing, or it too will freeze and will crack. I know; I did that one time, too!

Many RVs have heated tanks and some even have the under belly of the RV covered or enclosed. Often travel trailers that are not generally used in 4 seasons will have their tanks exposed. These are hard to keep from freezing; and probably the most effective way to keep everything from freezing is to not use the trailer tanks; but use campground facilities if they are available. Travel Trailers have a hard time with winter use; they often aren't insulated very well and many things are exposed. If you are buying a trailer and want to do some winter camping, sometimes the manufacturer offers an "artic" package which includes an upgrade on insulation and covered/enclosed underbody.

If your RV does have heated tanks, enclosed bays or under storage areas, usually running the furnace or locating a switch which operates/turns on electric pads that warm the tanks will be sufficient to keep everything from freezing. Some folks add 1 or two 60-100 watt light bulbs, in their underneath compartments, especially in the wet bay compartment (where the water and sewer connections are made). The light bulb will keep that compartment, as well as, the pump warm and protected. There are electrical connections that will turn the light on only when the temperature reaches a certain point.

Using your RV in the winter and keeping the tanks and the inside toasty and warm will consume LOTS of propane. One way to increase the supply of propane is to get an "Extenda-Stay" propane connector. It connects to an outside larger propane tank that can be refilled by propane supply companies. Or, you can break down camp and drive to a location that can fill your on board propane tank. In cold weather, 20s and below, you can easily run through 20-30 gallons of propane **very** quickly.

One thing to help conserve propane is to use an electric heater. Some prefer the small cube/ceramic heaters that are safe and effective; others like the oil filled heaters. Heaters are a personal choice; but they can help a lot with propane consumption. Beware that if you do use the electric heater and do not turn on your furnace if your RV uses the furnace to heat the tanks and under bays, the tanks could freeze. So you will want to set your furnace at a level where it will turn on. I use my electric heater to heat the RV, then when we go to bed, I turn the furnace to mid to low 50s or lower so that my tanks will be heated. If that's too low, you can purchase an electric blanket or mattress pad to help keep you warm at night. But this combination is a good way to conserve propane.

If you are staying in one place for most of the winter, under skirting would help with keeping the RV warm and tanks protected. There are many forms of under skirting available: plywood, heavy-duty plastic, foam and cement blocks. I'm sure there are others that I've missed. One thing that may cause a problem is using straw or hay bales. They attract rodents; get moldy and are hard to remove when they break down.

***Tips:***

Some have asked about chains for the RV, that is a personal choice. I would hesitate to use them

due to a couple of factors: they are heavy, need to be stored, and sometimes difficult to put on. Perhaps a couple more days in camp waiting for the roads to clear is a better choice.

Double paned windows are a great bonus in keeping cold and heat out. In motor homes with the big front window, keeping the drapes pulled will help hold the heat in.

Some RVers use pleated foil that comes in rolls from the hardware store to cover the windows. They cut them to size to fit in the windows which also helps immensely.

Another thing to be aware of is to open cabinet and closet doors to help keep the interior water lines from freezing. Often the water lines are mounted along the outside walls and cabinets and closets don't get direct heat. By opening doors, those areas will be heated as well.

Condensation can be a problem when you have an RV "buttoned up tight" to help keep warm. Sometimes condensation will build up, especially on the windows. If it does, open a window or an overhead vent just a crack. That should remove the condensation.

Winter RV camping can be great fun. You may see wildlife not seen in the busy summer months when visitors frighten them back deeper away from people. Every location looks different with a couple of inches of snow. But winter camping can be hard, usually you are confined to the inside of the RV because the outside elements are too harsh. You may find yourself with long hours in the RV. Whether you decide to winter RV camp or not; be sure you and your RV are prepared.....enjoy!