

## Maintenance Of Large Cargo Kayak Hatches by Tom Holtey

**NOTE: We stock Replacement Gaskets and strap kits for large hatches, bilge pumps, dry bags and the A-Hatch. Take a look at our full selection of hatch kits and supplies at The Top Kayaker Shop - HATCHES**

Large size cargo hatches on touring kayaks are a blessing for campers and scuba divers. They can however be problematic in maintaining a waterproof seal at times. Cargo hatches come in a variety of styles that have different degrees of durability, sealing and design.



One of the more common hatch styles consists of a large plastic lid that is held fast to the deck and hatch opening by means of cargo straps. A gasket seals the hatch by filling the space between the lid and the deck. The gasket is attached to the lid, hatch rim or both. This article will focus on the hatches that have one or two gaskets and close by means of cargo straps. (See "[Alternative Hatch Styles](#)" below")

The Ocean Kayak's Scupper Classic best demonstrates this type of hatch. The lid is secured by a pair cargo straps. A gasket is mounted along the edge of the lid, and fits snugly into the space around the hatch opening. Ocean Kayak and Perception improved upon this system by adding a second gasket to the rim of the hatch opening in addition to the gasket on the lid, on their Pro

and Prism kayaks.

Wilderness System's popular Tarpon has a very similar hatch configuration to the Classic, but utilizes three cargo straps to hold down the lid. This simple no nonsense design works remarkably well under many conditions, but can be trouble in very rough waters, extended capsized time and damaged gaskets from age and rough handling during loading.



Kayaks with these hatches are ready to use and will seal well, but can be improved upon. First you should understand how they are meant to be used. A new kayak will need to have the straps over the lid tightened before use. Close the hatch and ensure that it is seated properly. Snap the buckles closed and tug sharply on the loose end of the straps to tighten, while applying gentle pressure on the lid. Over tightening, or too much pressure on the lid can damage the gasket(s). Once adjusted you can open and close at will with only the occasional re-adjustment.

Damaged gaskets are the primary source of leaking of these larger hatches. While they can be damaged by over zealous sealing, it is more likely to damage a gasket by rough handling during loading. Bulky packages, like over size dry bags, coolers, and scuba tanks are the primary culprits.

Never force an item into the storage hatch; chances are you will break something, in the bag or out. Sliding bags over the gasket and rubbing it with cargo will wear it out. If you have trouble getting a big dry bag into a hatch try this. Unload the bag, put just the bag into the hatch, then reload the bag while it is in the kayak. It takes some time, but will save you a battle. Also select a larger number of smaller dry bags, rather than a smaller number of bigger bags. Scuba tank loading can be real hard on gaskets mounted on the hatch rim. A tank needs to slide in at and angle, and often must drag heavily on the rim of the hatch. You will find that the gasket on the rim can be easily removed before the loading process, of tanks, dry bags and coolers. Grasp the "trim lock", the part that is gripping the rim, not the softer seal, and pull gently away from the hull. (Make sure you grip the trim-lock, otherwise you WILL tear the softer gasket off.) Load up the gear and replace it.



After a while a gasket will fail from age and over use. Fear not! You can get replacements from the kayak shop or the manufacture. Double check the make and model and make sure you are ordering and getting the right parts. (Photo: Trim lock gasket spare parts)

So what do you do if the gasket fails during an outing, or right before a trip? Trusty duct tape to the rescue! A kayaker's best friend. A little duct tape will patch up most gasket problems. We even had to completely rebuild,

with tape, the entire set of gaskets in a rented kayak, hired for a wilderness trip, right on the beach before launch! I have dabbled in glue with limited success. It is a tricky and sticky job, but determination can yield results. (Photo: Torn gasket)



If only a few inches or two of the gasket is torn from the trim lock, glue can work, any more than that and you should get a replacement gasket or a roll of duct tape. If you do glue, have plenty of twist ties handy to hold the work together while the glue dries. You will have to remove the entire gasket from the kayak to work on it, leave plenty of time to cure before re-mounting it and use. (Photo: Repaired with Duct Tape)

For those of you who want to keep it cheap (**replacement gaskets** are now available in our shop) you can use pipe insulation, the type used to keep hot water pipes from losing heat.



Cut it a little bit longer than it needs to be (about an inch or more) and that will ensure a good push-on fit with a tight seal. Trim with duct tape as necessary. For the most part you will use 1/2" inside diameter X 1 3/8" outside diameter size pipe insulation, do some careful measuring of length and diameter needed and assess the stock at your local hardware store for the best size and fit. (Tarpon hatch



photos courtesy of Bob Giles)



For those folks who paddle in rough waters and demand the driest seals on their hatches there are steps that you can take to "upgrade" the stock gaskets. Scupper Classic and Wilderness Systems Tarpon paddlers can double up the gaskets on the large cargo hatches by adding a pipe insulation gasket to the rim around the opening. Use the same process as described above for replacing an old gasket with pipe insulation. (Photo left: Classic Hatch outfitted w/ pipe insulation gasket.)

For a kayak like the Scupper Pro or Perception Prism that already has gaskets on the rim and the lid, simply add a third cargo strap, like the Tarpon has for a tighter seal. I added the third strap to my Pro for this reason, and if any one strap should fail, there are two left to back it up with. (Photo right: Pro Hatch outfitted w/ 3 straps.)



For those with a Tarpons, and older On The Edge Kayaks, you can use weather stripping to make a counter-sealing gasket in spaces too small for pipe insulation. Weather stripping is used to seal the cracks around doorframes, to keep out drafts. Get the kind with the self-adhesive backing, and make sure the kayak is bone dry before sticking. Plan and measure carefully for best results. (Photo Left: Tarpon Hatch; weather stripping used as counterseal. photo & work by Bob Giles)



Scuba Divers, surfers, river runners and folks carrying heavy loads are in the most need of good sealing hatches. No one likes a boat that leaks, but all kayaks do leak a little bit. My rule of thumb is: "Less than a gallon, probably not a problem. More than a gallon probably is a problem."

Reduce this rule on calm water and increase in rough water.

I know of no make or model that is unsafe when used in the fashion it is meant to be used in, and have named a few kayaks here because they are noteworthy examples of these principles. Bear in mind that many kayaks can be improved upon, and some kayaks are not meant to be used in certain water conditions, and or, with certain hatch configurations. These principles can be applied to a variety of makes and models not mentioned in this article.

### More information about leaking hatches and bilge water management:

There are other strategies and approaches to handle leaking hatches and bilge water. It is a known safety measure for sit-in-side paddlers to carry a bilge pump. They will use it, after capsized, to drain their boat while on deep water. I recommend that sit-on-top kayakers, or at least one person per group, carry a bilge pump for situations of catastrophic leaking. This of course is rare, maybe as rare as a flat tire, but what car does not have a jack in the trunk?

Sit-in-side paddlers carry their pump in a handy spot on deck, sit-on-top paddlers have the luxury of stowing theirs in a hatch. Keep it handy, inside the hatch, just in case you come across an ill prepared sit-in-sider who has swamped. Scuba divers, open water paddlers and those with old kayaks should always have a pump.

Air bags, aka flotation bags, are also a known safety measure for sit-in-side paddlers. These are large bags, shaped to fit in bow and stern, and filled with air. They are like a life vest for your kayak. Air bags prevent the whole hull from flooding. Yes, they are very rarely used for sit-on-tops, but if you feel a need for extra flotation and safety, than this is a viable option.

Dry bags, loaded or unloaded, can provide the same benefit as float bags, provided they are not full of canned goods or something. I have considered, yet not implemented, using old wine bags from boxed wine under the seats and stuffed into tight places to act as poor man's float bags. I read in Sea Kayaker Magazine a story about military kayaks being stuffed with Ping-Pong balls as flotation, just in case the kayak was shot at. (That's not a suggestion, just a story.) Be safe and have fun!

### Alternative Hatch Styles:



Other types of hatches will utilize a **Neoprene cover** stretched onto a combing encircling the hatch rim and closed with a plastic lid secured by straps. You will find this style on some Necky and Perception kayaks. While this system does seal very effectively, and keeps the inside quite dry, it can be hard to use. A smaller hatch size can inhibit loading, and stretching the cover can be troublesome.



The system will not work if the neoprene cover is not in place, so double check to make sure the hatch is properly secure before launch. No improvement is necessary on this style of hatch, except possibly a small "leash" to keep the neoprene cover from getting lost.



Some large style cargo hatches, like **Cobra's "A" hatch**, which can be installed on any kayak with a large, flat surface, have a very effective seal. This is accomplished by use of many toggles sealing a plastic lid, to a rim fitted with an O-Ring like gasket. While it does provide a very dry seal, the many toggles may appear to be daunting. No improvement is necessary on this style of hatch, except possibly a small "leash" to keep the plastic lid from getting lost.



Many kayakers will be outfitted with a **Rubber Hatch Cover**. This type will snap onto a raised lip on deck, much like a Tupperware lid.



Care must be taken to ensure that cover is fully sealed prior to going on the water, and car-topping. Press firmly along every bit of the hatch edge to seal the entire perimeter, like sealing a Tupperware full of soup for your lunch bag. In some cases it is advised that one add a hatch strap or two, as seen above, to keep the cover from loosening and getting lost.

If you have any questions about your kayak's hatch or possible replacement hatches and parts, take a look at [The Top Kayaker Shop Hatches](#).

### Related Links & Articles:

Some helpful tools for kayak work are the Stanley Surform and a Marson HP-2 Hand Rivet Tool. I also highly recommend reviewing our article: [Basics of Strap Eyes, Rivets, & Well Nuts](#) For Customization & Repair of Your Sit-on-top Kayak.

### More Articles:

- [Viking Six Inch Kayak Hatch Installation Instruction](#) also by Tom Holtey
- [Kayak Hatch Replacement Options - Part I - Rubber Covers](#)
- [Kayak Hatch Replacement Options - Part II - Deck Plates](#)
- [Kayak Hatch Replacement Options - Part III - Double Cover Hatch Systems](#)

### RETURN TO ARTICLES LIST