

## MB-2 MEMBRANE CARE

Membrane life is affected by a large number of factors and is somewhat unpredictable. Membrane manufacturers give a predicted service life of about 7 years in commercial service, but they do all kinds of fancy chemical injections and never shut the thing off. Most cruisers are lucky to get five or six years out of one. You hear of the eight or ten year old membrane now and then. The biggest killers of membranes are lack of use, chlorine damage, and improper storage.

Don't let membranes sit around with sea water or stale fresh water in them. Biological growth will occur in the membrane. Here at the factory we frequently get back membranes for inspection that reek of hydrogen sulfide (rotten eggs). This odor is produced by anaerobic bacteria that live in stagnant water, feeding on whatever animal or vegetable matter is trapped in it from the plankton that gets through the system. Membranes badly fouled in this way can seldom be saved. These bacteria are always present but are inhibited by the oxygen in sea water while the unit is in frequent use, by scheduled fresh water flushes, or by pickling. Keeping the prefilters clean is also important in preventing bio-fouling. If your prefilters are allowed to become a breeding ground for bacteria (get smelly), the contamination will spread throughout the system. When we cut open a failed membrane we also find fungi, another form of bio fouling, probably due to long term storage with no biocide or stale biocide.

After many hours of water making, mineral deposits will form and must be dissolved away with an acid cleaner. Alkaline cleaners are used for bio-fouling. Cleaning chemicals, especially the alkaline, are not good for the membrane. Every time you clean the membrane it shortens its life. Clean only when necessary, and avoid cleaning as a "diagnostic tool".

Chlorine, Bromine, Hydrogen Peroxide, or any strong oxidizer can easily ruin a membrane. They attack the material that the membrane is made from. Spectra membranes are rated for 1000ppm-hours Chlorine exposure, so city water having 3 ppm Chlorine would ruin a membrane in less than 2 weeks. Always use product water or water filtered slowly through a fresh charcoal filter for flushing and chemical treatments.

Oil simply plugs up the matrix of the membrane and clogs it up. We have brought back oil fouled membranes with Joy soap (See MB-5 Cleaning with Detergent.)

For storage we recommend using propylene glycol potable water system antifreeze if available. It can safely be left in the system for one year and will keep things from freezing in cold conditions. It is hard to find in warm climates, and takes up a lot of room on a small boat, so our SC-1 is best for tropical cruising.

Given good care a membrane will eventually just start to slowly fade away. The feed pressure may rise and/or the ppm go up. Hardly ever will they just fail overnight.

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