

water leak finding

Spring is finally here! Hopefully all of the snow has melted and is now just a bad memory; we were definitely blessed with more snow than we needed.

A fellow Airstreamer asked me recently about water leak detection in his Airstream trailer, so I thought I would try to briefly share some of my thoughts.

Inspection procedures for Identifying Water Leaks—Airstream Trailers

Water leaks are challenging at best, if there is a way to get into your Airstream, water can find it. The average Airstream has at least 3000 holes drilled into its skin along with various seams, doors, vents and windows. Add to that the fact your Airstream is a house on wheels that bounces, bends, flexes and is exposed to wind and sun; the opportunity for leaks to develop over time is there. Even though Airstreams are sealed and leak tested at the factory, leaks can happen. All RVs are susceptible to leaks and is something that can be addressed through regular inspections and maintenance.

Early intervention

You should inspect your Airstream for potential water leaks at least once a year at a minimum. I recommend at least twice a year inspections, once in the spring and again in the fall before storing for winter.

Every seam on any RV and anywhere the manufacturer routes a hole in an RV, have the potential, over time, to allow water in. To protect your investment, take the time to inspect all of the rivets, seams and sealants on your roof, side walls, doors and windows.

An Airstream shell consists of aluminum outer and inner aluminum skins with aluminum extruded aluminum wall members and floor channels. Your Airstream trailer also has fiberglass insulation, which with the aluminum shell and no wood or particle board in the walls virtually eliminates the chance of water damage to those areas.

Water damage on an RV, if left undetected, can cause water staining of fabrics, paneling and flooring. Here are some things to look for during your inspections.

First, be safe!

When you are working on the roof of your Airstream you can be seriously injured from a fall! Always have someone with you if you will be inspecting your Airstream using a ladder. Be sure to be careful when working on the roof of your Airstream and step on the cross members. If working in one specific area you may want to take a piece of paneling 3'x3' with soft carpet on the bottom to spread out your weight on the roof. Never put your weight on the front or rear end caps.

Exterior:

To stop a leak before it starts thoroughly inspect all roof and body seams.

Look for any discoloration or cracking of the sealant around roof vents, skylights, TV antennas, plumbing vents, and any other openings that were cut in the roof.

Look for missing or gapping rivet heads. Check for loose or missing screws at awning brackets, stone guard and wrap protector brackets. (Components tend to move and loosen with use).



Check all vent caps, tank vents and skylights for any cracks.

Check all vent and fan gaskets to make sure they are not torn, twisted or cracked and that they seal properly when closed.

Check for cracks in marker light lenses and the sealant around marker light bases



Interior:

Locate items like the refrigerator access compartment, water heater, furnace, outside shower, water fill and city water inlet on the outside of your trailer; then inspect the areas from the inside and look for any indications of moisture in these areas.

Look for any discoloration of wall rag, wallpaper, carpet and feel for any dampness.

Access all outside storage compartments and inspect for any indications of water leaks or water damage.

Investigate any unusual odors.

Identify a leak versus what could be condensation.

Don't just look at your Airstream for water damage; **Inspect** for water damage. If you do this on a regular basis you should be able to locate and repair the source of any water leak before it has a chance to become a problem. (A good time to inspect the inside of your trailer for moisture is when you are washing your trailer and already have your hose and ladder out).

Looking for a leak

Airstream uses the following procedures and equipment to test for water leaks in our Service Center:

Water hose:

If you suspect a leak in a certain area get out your garden hose and spray nozzle. Always start down low and work your way up the trailer when trying to locate a leak. It is easier to rule out areas using this method, if you start at the top and let water run over a large area the source of the leak could be coming from anywhere.

You can also use duct or masking tape to seal off areas you suspect maybe the leak source and verify by retesting. This test you can do yourself to locate a leak. If this doesn't work you will need to visit your dealer for more in depth testing.

Water Testing Tree:

In our Service shop we use a device that has a series of high pressure nozzles that can cover a larger area when testing. Height can be adjusted to change angle and direction of water flow.



SealTech:

We also have purchased a SealTech machine to aid in the detection of water leaks. This system pressures the interior of the RV and then a soapy solution is sprayed on the exterior and the escaping air will cause the solution to bubble at the air source.



SealTech

If you have identified the source of a leak, you can check out our sealants at www.airstream.com for sealants compatible with the different areas of your Airstream.