

Give Me Shelter

Your aircraft deserves a home

BY STEVEN W. ELLS (From [AOPA Pilot](#), March 2005.)

Portion of the article...

It's unfortunate but airplanes age faster when they're exposed to the elements. It doesn't matter if an airplane is based in Anchorage or Atlanta, Tucson or Tampa — the elements take their toll. Heavy-snow loads overstress airplane structures — even when the airplane survives the weight of the snow, well-meaning but misguided pilots can cause damage during snow removal. One short burst of hail forever alters the appearance (and value) of ramp-tied airplanes. Gusty winds damage control surfaces by applying abnormally high loads to hinges, tabs, control rods and rod ends, bell cranks, pulleys, and cables. Moisture invariably seeps past doors during rainy spells. This accelerates airframe corrosion and mildews carpets and upholstery. Elevated temperatures accelerate the aging of expensive fuel bladders, while ultraviolet rays cloud windows and speed the aging of upholstery, tires, and paint. High in-cabin temperatures dry out hoses and cause the plastics used in cabin trim to lose elasticity and become brittle. Dust and dirt accumulate in wheel wells, engine compartments, and every conceivable corner of the airframe. This patina of fine dirt accelerates wear in delicate instruments and contaminates lubricants.

Birds appropriate space wherever they can get access, building nests to raise the next generation. Birds, like ancient tribes, leave behind evidence of their stay, but no maintenance technician or owner wants to face the task of removing and neutralizing the effects of the droppings, nesting grasses, and remains of tiny creatures that didn't make it to the flyaway age.

In addition to weather-borne woes, owners that tie their airplanes down outside are also more likely to be victimized by thieves. If they're lucky their loss will be limited to a few gallons of avgas. If they're not, that expensive radio stack will have to be replaced. Finally, the potential for ramp rash — those scratches, knocks, dents, and dings that accumulate on the fragile surfaces of light airplanes — inevitably increases for airplanes that are tied down. Temporary measures can slow the degradation, but nothing takes the place of the complete protection of a well-constructed hangar.

Owners also need to look at one more cost that is often left out of the equation — insurance. Insurance companies usually add a surcharge to policies on airplanes that are tied down outside. These charges can range from 3 to 4 percent up to 10 percent. One broker said he knew of one company that refuses to write insurance for airplanes that are not hangared.

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