



Hatch a Plan!

A bit of DIY can pay big dividends in the long run says our Techspert, Pia, from [Southern Spirit Campervans](#)...

Most RVs are fitted with one or more skylights or roof hatches to improve air flow and ventilation, and to bring in more natural light. They are a great feature, but on the other hand can become the weak spot on your roof. Many things can cause them to need replacing, like hail or impact damage, cracking from UV exposure or a water leak.

Depending on the size, replacing one isn't out of reach of a reasonably competent DIYer, so here's a rundown on what to do. Remember, hatches come in various types and models from brands such as Dometic, Fiamma, Camco and Omnistor. This means they might differ when

it comes to installation as some inner frames are separate from the outer frame while on others the inner and outer frames screw into each other. Also, some are singled glazed PVC domes while others are double glazed acrylic.

What you need:

Most obviously, purchase the correct replacement hatch! That said, you don't have to stay with the same brand, just make sure you choose a hatch that will fit your existing roof cut out, for example 400 mm x 400 mm. You can check the required size by removing the inner frame of your hatch and measuring the cut-out.

Also, make sure you buy a new hatch to suit the thickness of your roof. Alternatively, check with the manufacturer if in any doubt. For example the Dometic Heki can be ordered in for a roof thickness of 24-42 mm or 43-60 mm. This is essential to ensure your new patch will fit properly.

Note: The replacement of a roof hatch requires some DIY skills, so if you are unsure about the task and your skill level have the job done by a professional RV repairer.

Tools and Material

- Cordless drill/Phillips head screw driver
- Flathead screw driver
- Putty spatula
- Stanley Knife
- Cleaning rag
- Cleaner (must suit the roof skin material e.g. mineral turps, Sika cleaner)
- Adhesive primer, which varies and will depend on the material the new hatch is made from. For example the Dometic Heki and Thule Omnivents need a primer such as Sika 215 to ensure the sealant adheres to the new hatch. For the roof surface itself you also have to know which material it's made from and apply a suitable primer, such as Sika 206 for painted metal
- A UV stable, permanent and slightly elastic/flexible bonding adhesive or sealant such as Sika 221 (easier to remove later on and permanently elastic) or a butyl-based sealant
- To seal the frame from outside you can also use Dicor Lap sealant. Click [here](#) for an installation job using this product.



54 | TechTalk

Steps to Replacement

Warning: Hatch replacement requires working on the roof of your vehicle. Ensure you have secured the ladder or other access system and take extreme care when working at heights. If you are uncomfortable with this or at any stage during the installation process, have the job done professionally. Do not attempt during wet, windy or hot weather and ensure the roof is dry.

1. Unpack the new hatch and read the installation manual! Check the hatch and all parts are complete and in undamaged condition.
2. Unscrew internal frame. Some hatches have only these screws, which hold the inner and outer frame together. This means you will find no extra screws on the outside of the roof hatch.
3. Ensure the roof is dry. CAREFULLY climb up and have all your tools and required equipment with you.
4. Remove sealant covering existing screws (if there is any).
5. Remove screws.
6. Remove all other easy-to-reach sealant. You can use a putty spatula to do so but be careful not to damage the roof skin!
7. Now you might be able to lift the complete outer hatch off the roof. This will be relatively easy if Butyl sealant was used. In case the hatch was installed with Sika sealant or similar, you might need a flathead screw driver to lift the frame a bit and then cut the sealant careful with a Stanley knife all around. Again, make sure you do not damage the roof skin while doing so.



8. Once the hatch has been removed make sure you remove **all** remaining sealant and dirt.
9. With the hatch removed check the framing between the outer roof skin and internal ceiling to see if any water damage have caused timber rot.
10. Clean and prime the roof area and hatch, as required.
11. Apply sealant to roof hatch. Make sure it's applied **ALL** around in equal amounts with no gaps!
12. Place outer roof hatch into position and screw on, either from outside or inside, depending on model.
13. Fit the inner frame (in case this wasn't done in the previous step).
14. Seal the roof-side screws and seal around the hatch frame. Make sure you seal properly and completely to avoid water leaks. This sealed area should be checked on a six monthly basis.



TIP: To protect your roof hatch from sun and hail damage, etc, plus to help keep cooler in summer (and warmer in winter), consider a protection cover. Covers for several brands are available on eBay or you can email us at Southern Spirit Campervans by clicking [here](#) with your hatch details.