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Easy Electrical Upgrades

Consider these electrical upgrades as you look forward to next year's cruising season

WE HAD AN AMAZING CRUISING season on the West Coast and we hope you have been spending some quality time on your boat. In fact, you may have even started your wish list for next cruising season. With that in mind, here are some upgrades we think you should consider.

Upgrading Lights One of the easiest ways to brighten your surroundings and lower your electrical draw is LED or low voltage cabin lights, as they draw about 1/10 of a typical light. The options are better than they have ever been and, in some cases, it can be as simple as switching the bulbs in your existing fixtures. If you have an older boat and decide to replace the entire fixture, the choices are even greater. The challenge is to find a fixture that will cover the large mark on the headliner left by the old fixture. But there is a simple solution, we have clients who cover a piece of board with headliner fabric, large enough to cover the mark, and install the fixture to that.

After choosing a bulb type that either fits your existing or new fixture, you will want to ensure that you choose the right colour of light. Before taking the plunge and buying all the LEDs for your boat, try a variety of LEDs. The colours are quite different, some will be

bluish white, others harsh white, and some yellow. It comes down to your personal preference.

Ideally you want to swap out all your lights to LED. But depending on your budget, you might want to start by replacing the lights that you use more often. For instance, some of the ones in the saloon or in the galley.

Another great power saving idea is to install a low amperage anchor light. The average anchor light draws one to two amps per hour. The new LED version draws 0.1 amps per hour, saving you seven to 15 amps in an eight-hour period. They are brighter, and in most cases are plug and play.

Shore Power Corrosion Detector A relatively new item on the market is the Marinco GalvanAlert, it is the only shore power corrosion detector with a reverse polarity indicator. It attaches to your existing 30-amp shore power inlet and constantly monitors if there is unsafe corrosion activity or a reverse polarity situation.

The GalvanAlert incorporates sensor-based technology that monitors unsafe galvanic or stray current corrosion flowing through the green ground wire of your shore power system. If you are thinking, "What if I already have a galvanic isolator?" Galvanic isolators only protect against galvanic action, and they will not block corrosion currents driven by more than 1.5 volts. You may be fine at your own marina but if you are travelling around to new destinations with a lot of transient traffic, you just never know.

4-in-1 Monitor Another new product that is getting a lot of attention is the Blue Sea Vessel Systems 4-in-1 Monitor. The VSM 422 will monitor your AC systems (voltage, amperage, watts, frequency), DC systems





(voltage, amperage, battery state of charge—amp hours remaining, time remaining, percent charge, battery temperature), tank levels (fuel, water, waste) and bilge (active, cycle count, volume, duration). The monitor has three display functions, large font, icon or multi-line text. It is fully programmable and offers adjustable alarm functions to suit your boat. This new unit from Blue Sea really takes the guess work out of the major systems. The only downside is its proprietary nature, as such you won't be able to share this data on a NMEA2000 network.

Dinghy Wiring An often overlooked electrical system is the one on your tender. Do you remember the last time you had a good look at the wiring on your dinghy? They tend to take on more water and spray, and sometimes the wiring is not as secure as it should be. Get yourself a bag of heat shrink connectors, zap straps and a wire brush. Clean the battery connections, re-do the heat-shrink if it looks worn, tighten any nuts and remove any wing nuts if you have them.

Also look out for spade connectors that have come loose. Consider slightly crimping the ends to allow the spade connector to have more friction. One of our favourite sayings on the dock is, "waterproof wire connectors aren't waterproof forever." Enjoy your Fall boating. ☺



Jeff Cote is a systems design engineer and owner of Pacific Yacht Systems, a full-service shop delivering marine electrical and navigation solutions for recreational boats. Visit their website and blog for info and articles on marine electrical systems, projects and more. www.pysystems.ca

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