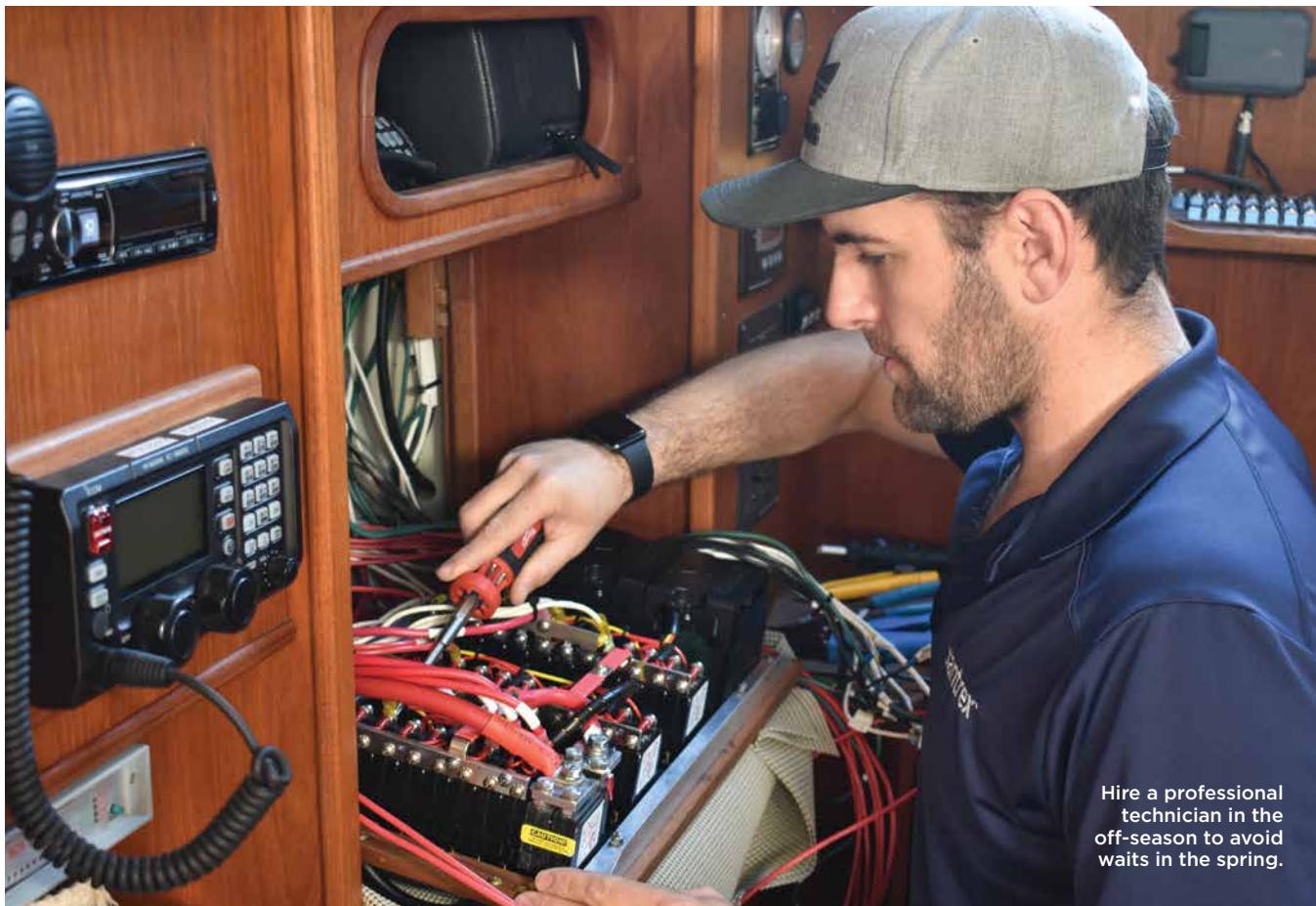




## TECH TALK



# FIVE FALL PROJECTS

Get a head start on next year by scheduling your maintenance projects for the fall and winter

**BY JEFF COTE**

PACIFIC YACHT SYSTEMS

**B**oaters know how difficult it can be to find someone qualified to work on their boat during the busy spring and summer months in the Pacific Northwest. As a fellow boater and marine business owner, I can tell you how disheartening it is to tell a boater that our

waitlist can be up to one or two months during the busy season. This can be further exacerbated when we have to coordinate with mechanics, metal fabricators or upholstery companies. Procrastination rarely pays off and certainly not with boating projects. In order for trades companies, including PYS, to keep good people, it is ▶

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imperative that we provide year-round employment and invest time and money to train technicians on the ever-changing technologies. This means that, for the most part, the staffing levels for the prime boating season are relatively the same as the off-season when many boats have been winterized and put away.

As boaters, we can complain about this reality all we want but there is a limited pool of qualified technicians to pull from. Boats are getting more complicated and are becoming a big investment. Unfortunately, it's not realistic to properly train a technician in only a few months to work on the wide variety of boats that exist in our industry.

In an ideal world, boaters would like to receive quality work in a timely manner at a reasonable cost. Veteran boaters know that if they tackle projects between October and January, they have the best chance for receiving all three. In our experience, booking projects at the boat show frenzy in February is sometimes too late for even an early spring cruise.

An important variable to consider is how frequently your boat gets used. Let's remember that many boat systems fail because they aren't being used enough. A well-used boat is much less likely to experience a failing system compared to a boat that sits at the dock or in storage unused until your next big trip. Here are a few projects to consider this fall.

## #1



### CHANGE AGING BATTERIES

Take this opportunity to replace your batteries, or even consider changing them from flooded lead acid to absorbed glass mat (AGM) batteries. The main advantages of AGM are that they are maintenance free, have a longer life, and have more usable amp-hours. Perhaps you want to increase the battery bank size to get more time away from the dock or less time running the generator. Some boaters are hesitant to

change batteries thinking their batteries will age over the winter. Let's remember that batteries only age when they are being used (i.e. cycled up and down) and batteries don't age being float charged at the dock.

## #2



### INSTALL AN ALTERNATOR

Another popular fall project is to increase the way you recharge your batteries while underway. Many boaters are installing high output alternators (100 to 250 amps) with external regulators that act as a smart three-phase charger to recharge the batteries while the engine is running. High output alternators and external regulators can dramatically reduce the amount of time it takes a boater to recharge the house batteries. As battery banks increase in size, remember to have an alternator sized to at least 10 percent and up to 40 percent of the battery bank size.

## #3



### INSTALL SOLAR PANELS

Every year, we are doing more and more solar arrays on boats. Solar arrays are not just a feel good purchase, they actually work and provide tangible charging benefits to boaters here on the West Coast. The fall is a great time to tackle these sorts of projects because fabricators and/or canvas shops are not as busy and it's easier to collaborate and get a job done. Even powerboaters are installing solar arrays to dramatically reduce the generator runtime or, in some cases, are removing the generator altogether. Flexible solar panels offer a variety of mounting options, such as sewing panels to zippers or Velcro to affix them to canvas or perhaps using the optional peel and stick adhesive to adhere them to the hardtop. With rigid panels, we are mounting them on rails, arches and even surface mounting them with a small air gap.

## #4



### UPGRADE YOUR NAV SYSTEM

Navigation systems have also come a long way since the first GPS and basic depth sounders. Many boaters are embracing the new technology that makes navigation systems far more user-friendly. At PYS, we do most of our navigation system installs in the fall. Radars are making it easier for boaters to understand which targets are more dangerous than others. Fishfinders are not only showing boaters what is underneath the boat but also what is in front and to the sides of the boat. Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) allow boaters to see one another on the chartplotter and to quickly assess if they are on a collision course or even know the name of the vessel to hail them over the VHF.

## #5



### INSTALL A HEATING SYSTEM

Lastly, there is no better time than the off-season to enjoy the benefits of a new heating system for your boat. Hydronic heating systems provide the benefit of not only heating the cabin but also warming water for showers or the galley.

**AS AN EXAMPLE,** I do all of my boat projects in the fall because I know that good techs are readily available. Companies must be able to survive the boom and bust of our seasonal weather. The industry is not changing so I am encouraging you to get ahead of the curve and entertain the idea of scheduling your projects and repairs for this off-season. ▶▶