

# Fleet Maintenance: Keeping Equipment Clean

By Preston Ingalls



**T**he first thing to recognize about fleet management is that it is asset management. However, doing it well is not a natural process for most organizations. Because of that, many organizations inherently spend too much maintaining their fleet. We spend too much because we don't have a full comprehension of the impact of our actions or inactions on that equipment. In other words, we don't know what we don't know.

DuPont, a world leader in manufacturing excellence, states, "Maintenance is the largest single controllable expenditure in an operation; in many companies it often exceeds annual net profit." With that in mind, what can be done to keep the fleet in check? The answer: routine checks and keeping the equipment clean.

## THE ISSUES WITH CLEANLINESS

So why do we have so many issues with keeping equipment clean? Because it is a low priority. In many organizations, it is, "Production! Production! Production!" So, if a crew works up until the last possible moment before finishing the day's work and have not allowed any time for cleaning the equipment—it may be a long time between cleanings. Also, cleaning does not

seem to add value to the job, and in fact, seems to leadership to distract valuable labor from the important tasks. However, a poor emphasis by leadership on keeping equipment clean has a bearing on the crews' attitude toward equipment care. The following are guidelines for making cleanliness a priority.

**Make it mandatory.** "If it is not important to my boss, it is not important to me." Also, determine just what sort of cleaning needs to be done on your equipment. Construction equipment is much harder to clean than vehicles which have casual road dust on them. The frequencies and level of work required will be different.

**Determine the schedule that works best for your company.** Examine the OEM recommendations in the manual. If your fleet isn't active at night, then cleaning the vehicles during the evening hours would be the best way to make sure that vehicles are clean, but that they aren't taken out of the fleet during working hours. If your fleet works 24 hours a day, then you might want to have a policy that vehicles need to be washed every week, or after every completed job. You should also ask yourself if the interior needs to be cleaned as often as

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the exterior, since the interior doesn't usually get contaminated as quickly, and cleaning it takes longer. Perhaps an interior detailing once every other week would work for your company, depending on the state of the fleet.

**Decide if you are going to outsource the cleaning or keep it in-house.**

There are service companies that clean equipment on the spot. There is far more value in the equipment operators cleaning the equipment as it allows them to get up closer to the equipment and spot changes in condition. It also builds a sense of pride in ownership, a step toward operator stewardship. If you want to do your cleaning in-house, then you need to have a staging area and proper cleaning equipment—a power washer might be necessary, but certainly hoses, towels, and soaps. Train the employees on the value of cleaning equipment—not just on how. Consider mounting power washers on the back of foremen or service trucks.

**Develop a standard showing the when, how, and who.** Our memories are not very good and they seem to be less reliable as we get older. Have a cleaning standard for a piece of equipment in the form of a checklist. Audit compliance by examining the condition of the equipment compared to the standard.

**Fix leaks and replace worn seals immediately, and control operating temperature by keeping the system full and maintaining the oil cooler and relief valves.** Pay a little extra for higher quality hydraulic fluids and store everything in a controlled environment to minimize contamination ingress.

**Cleaning needs to be more than a wipe-down.** Some of the major benefits come from the inspection of the individual components we touch. Therefore, it is important that we lift hoods and covers to examine the inside. Wiping excess oil off the dipstick and reinserting allows a person to see the correct level on the clean dipstick. We clean to inspect because we inspect to detect.

**Small routine cleanings make more sense than periodic long ones.** Ten minutes at the end of a day is easier to find than an hour or two in a week. Short-duration cleaning cycles can create the habits to extend the life of equipment.

There is another benefit to cleaning. It allows us to “showcase” our equipment. Pride and ownership comes easier when the equipment is clean and free of wear-causing dirt and grime. It is much like the feeling you get when you have washed and waxed your vehicle; it looks good and you feel good. A great sense of pride should be

in that piece of equipment, which will be a “billboard” on the back of a low boy heading down the road. It is an advertisement of the importance your company places on taking care of its equipment. ■

*Remember: Routine cleanings can go far in extending the life of the equipment and ensuring its reliability.*



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