



MAINTENANCE MATTERS

PLAN ON IT: The merits of preventative maintenance

In this day and age of rising expenses and tight profit margins, there is ample reason for fleet managers, even those with just one unit, to examine their preventative maintenance (PM) practices.

Have a plan

If there are so many urgent repairs going on in your shop that you don't have the time or money to do your preventative maintenance, you're in trouble and it's going to get worse. The trick with maintaining a fleet is to avoid this vicious circle in the first place. How can you do that? Have a preventative maintenance plan and make it your number-one priority to stick to that plan. This is a challenge that will have to be met if you're going to stay in business; it's that simple.

But, you might ask, if you have a brand new unit what could go wrong? It's under warranty, you say? Yes, newer is better, but should you neglect mandatory things like drive train oil changes, you could be in for a rude shock. It's not unheard of for engine, transmission and axle manufacturers to demand maintenance records if they see evidence of poor maintenance resulting in a failure. In some cases, you could even be refused those repairs under warranty, and that could sting for a long time.

Usually it won't come down to anything that dramatic. However, delaying or neglecting PM will dictate that you're just going to pay for breakdowns and repairs sooner and more often.

More than just oil changes

Good PM goes way further than merely an oil change and a lube job. Think of your unit as an active preservation project. Consider your equipment as irreplaceable and instill every attitude and take every step to further those objectives.

Scheduling a routine PM cycle can also mean all of your service parts and fluids are on hand and waiting. This will help keep the coach out of service for shorter periods and keep the shop turnaround times shorter.

Making it happen

So, now that you're sold on preventative maintenance, what does it take to make it work? It takes a plan. That plan can take the form of a computer program, or it can be done on paper using log books or file folders, supplemented with a simple chalk board. Every maintenance action taken on every vehicle should be carefully recorded, but there has to be a plan. Looking at your units required maintenance but to take things further, one should consult with one's engine and transmission distributors for the latest PM requirements.

An example of a PM requirement is Service Bulletin 3039. Caterpillar requires thrust washer end play to be checked at every oil change interval or 10,000 — 12,000 mile intervals on all unit configured with a C12 or C13 engine and a ZF transmission. Consider using oil analysis at every oil change to detect problems, preventing unneeded down time.

Paying for it — and making it pay

So now you have a new chalk board and, some new log books, and the shop is all fired up about this new initiative.

The PM initiative must be budgeted and funded. The shop manager should be expected to furnish weekly or monthly staff reports to the management showing which objectives have been met or describing shortfalls. In smaller organizations, it may be helpful to farm out oil changes and lube jobs if workloads become oppressive; however, an inspection by an in-house employee is still highly important and must be documented.

Your PM program will have to be encouraged and respected by every level of your organization and all the departments, especially at the leadership level. Without their active support, the initiative will fail miserably. All managers need to be flexible, reasonable and work to accommodate the group objectives.

Once you have it all in place, chances are, you'll have far fewer of those urgent repairs and bad-for-business breakdowns. And in the end, your PM plan should more than pay for itself.

