

8 Secrets to Maximizing Fleet ROI

Take simple steps now to get the most out of equipment and vehicles down the road.

It's a good bet that when you were growing up, your parents, a teacher or mentor told you to "take care of your things and they will take care of you." It may have been in reference to your first bike or a car, but that simple advice also applies today if you are managing a fleet of equipment or vehicles. The only difference is that today, by taking care of your fleet, you are also taking steps to achieve a faster and better Return On Investment (ROI). And that is simply good business.

Your company has made a significant investment in equipment and vehicles and you depend on them every day to get the job done. Maintaining and keeping that fleet clean goes a long way toward reducing downtime, enhancing performance, preventing potential accidents and extending service life. The following paper lets you in on 8 "secrets" gathered from company owners and fleet managers who understand that it is a lot easier to do maintenance on equipment and vehicles than it is to have them fail on the job and leave you facing expensive repairs and idle time. If you want the latest dirt on improving fleet ROI, read on.

1 Clean Up Your Preventative Maintenance Program

It's no secret that a preventative maintenance program is essential to operating a fleet of equipment or vehicles with maximum uptime. Most likely you already have some type of scheduled maintenance program based on time, mileage, fuel usage or some other criteria. You change the oil. Replace worn parts. Lubricate, inspect and test.

But too often one of the most important aspects of a maintenance program is overlooked -- a good, thorough cleaning. Plain and simple, cleaning can extend equipment life and help prevent problems, especially for machinery and vehicles used in harsh, dirty environments.



Let's take the diesel engine as an example. Diesel engines are at the heart of heavy equipment, trucks and other vehicles. One of the main causes of engine failure is overheating, many times caused by air flow restriction. The inlet side of the engine's radiator can get clogged with dirt and debris, blocking air flow until the engine overheats. That can result in costly repairs -- in the tens of thousands of dollars -- or even engine replacement.

Regular cleaning of the radiator with a pressure washer or other method as part of preventative maintenance would help avoid such a problem. The same is true for the engine itself and other moving components of the fleet equipment. Even a small amount of dirt, sand or debris can create big problems by causing premature wear, rust or corrosion. Other benefits of cleaning as part of preventative maintenance include improved safety for operators and employees. Obviously, clear mirrors, windshields and service windows are critical, as are grease-free hand grips, levers and equipment handles.

Fewer problems with equipment and vehicles translate to higher ROI. Just remember:

keep it clean = keep it running + keep it safe

2 Detect Problems More Clearly

The inspection portion of any fleet maintenance program is meant to spot potential problems before they can cause any damage or downtime. Inspection checklists are rightfully lengthy and may include checking for worn parts, maintaining proper fluid levels, looking over hoses, fuel lines, and cooling systems, etc., etc.

The inspection process, however, can easily be compromised by dirt and grime on equipment and fleet vehicles. Inspecting a component caked in dirt or grease is just asking for trouble as problems such as small leaks or cracks may not be readily apparent. What starts as a small oil leak can cause costly problems, resulting in downtime and extra maintenance costs.

Thorough cleaning exposes the part or component entirely so inspectors can spot problems more easily. This is especially important on the engine compartments,



undercarriages and wheel wells of equipment that come under constant attack from dirt and debris. An inspection is only as good as the ability to see problems by the person doing the inspecting. There is more to be seen when you keep it clean.

3 Enhance Your Pristine Reputation

The appearance of your fleet equipment and vehicles says a lot about your company. Clean, well-maintained vehicles speak volumes about pride of ownership, quality and company image. If they are out on the road, your vehicles and their graphics present a moving billboard to potential customers. You may even be more susceptible to DOT vehicle inspections if your fleet looks dirty and in disrepair.

Just as you expect employees to present themselves in a professional manner, you should demand the same from your vehicles. Regular cleaning keeps dirt and grime from obstructing your company name, logo, phone number and web address. The same goes for your physical plant and headquarters, where dirty signage, windows and building entryways can turn off potential customers.

Cleaning up appearances works to improve fleet ROI by helping attract new business and retain existing customers. In today's competitive environment, looks matter, so look out for your equipment.



4 Gain Do-It-Yourself Efficiency

You could contract out the scheduled cleaning of equipment and vehicles. But that can get expensive and thus reduce the ROI. Take over-the-road trucks as an example. It can typically cost as much as \$80 for one wash, for one vehicle. Multiply that by the number of vehicles in the fleet, and soon you are talking some big bucks. That's not to mention the downtime of the vehicles as the contractor is cleaning them, often off-site.

Initiating your own scheduled cleaning program is more cost-efficient in the long run and in general results in less downtime. You can turn-around the cleaning process quicker so the equipment is back to work when you need it. As the vehicle is being cleaned, other maintenance tasks can be performed at the same time, further reducing necessary downtime.

5

Protect Your Environment

Oil, transmission fluid, brake fluid and gasoline or diesel fuel are the lifeblood of equipment and vehicles. But even with the best maintenance programs, leaks happen. Our roads and highways are covered in leaked fluids, road salt, sand and other materials that are certainly hazardous to our environment as a whole. They are also hazardous to your own environment -- your fleet, facility, property, plant and garage where equipment and vehicles are used and kept.

By including regular cleaning on your maintenance schedule, you reduce the risk of damage from leaked fluids. You also protect the health of your employees.

The obvious example is a fleet of trucks out on the road day after day, picking up oil, grease, and grime and carrying it back to the company. On rainy days and in winter weather, the problem is compounded by rainwater and snow rinsing the material off the equipment and onto your parking lot or shop floor.

A vehicle cleaning program in a designated area helps prevent leaked oils and fluids from contaminating other areas of your site. Cleaning removes these materials before they can lead to rust and corrosion damage on the equipment itself. It reduces employee exposure to the materials. Plus regular cleaning prevents the leaked fluids from being reintroduced to the environment when your fleet goes back out into service.



6

Factor in the Lease or Own Equation

Whether you lease or own your equipment fleet, keeping everything clean and in order is to your advantage when it comes to ROI. Your particular situation will dictate whether you lease or own, but both require a proper maintenance program to help you get the most from what you have invested.

If you lease, your terms may require regular, scheduled maintenance including cleaning of the equipment. If you have to contract out for such cleaning, that can get expensive, adding to your actual total leasing costs and affecting ROI. And when the lease is up, and the equipment or vehicle must be turned in, a clean appearance can help to avoid fees or charges related to vehicle condition.

If you own, you obviously want your equipment or vehicles to last as long as possible. Regular cleaning, as we have noted throughout, helps to extend vehicle life so you get the most out of it. There is also that pride of ownership we mentioned earlier. You have a very real stake in the equipment.

In both cases, for lease or own, regular maintenance that includes in-house cleaning is the most cost-efficient way to achieve a better ROI.

7 Be Ready for Resale

If you own, at some point you will probably sell or trade-in your equipment or vehicles, as you upgrade to new equipment or complete the expected life cycle. ROI comes into play when you start talking about resale value. Quite simply, clean sells. A clean vehicle, that has been regularly maintained, will command a higher price at resale or a higher trade-in value. The result of higher resale value? Better ROI.

8 Have the Right Tools

The first 7 secrets have clearly shown the benefits of regular maintenance and cleaning of your equipment fleet for improving ROI. For secret 8, having the right tools to do the job is equally important. Be sure to invest in high quality equipment and tools you know you can rely on for maintenance and cleaning. If your cleaning equipment breaks down in the middle of the job, that means downtime and all the benefits of do-it-yourself efficiency on ROI can go down the drain.

Buy your tools from a knowledgeable dealer who can advise you on the best solution for your needs and help you with training employees on the equipment. Keep in mind employee safety as well when considering tools. Your dealer should be able to provide parts and service quickly if needed. The same goes for supplies such as soaps, cleaning solutions and other accessories. Your dealer should help you maintain supply inventories so you don't run out at the wrong time. Low downtime for your cleaning and maintenance tools means higher uptime for your equipment and vehicles.



Summary

Now the 8 secrets to maximizing your fleet ROI are clean and clear. With the cost of equipment and vehicles constantly on the rise, it just makes sense to keep these in mind as part of your maintenance program. It is worth repeating:

keep it clean = keep it running + keep it safe

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