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## Vehicle Maintenance

Well-managed vehicle maintenance programs are extremely important in any business that operates motor vehicles. Reduced operational costs, reduced accidents from vehicle defects, and improved public opinion are direct benefits of a well-implemented maintenance policy.

All successful maintenance programs depend on the support of top management and effective communication. Drivers, maintenance personnel, and supervisors must be held accountable for the condition of vehicles, and clear lines of communication need to be established between them. Periodic review of a company's existing maintenance program, and the degree to which it is being carried out on a daily basis, will help management determine if any program modifications are necessary.

When a company performs its own maintenance, adequate facilities and equipment must be provided, as well as ongoing training of mechanics to keep them abreast of changes in equipment and repair procedures. Companies using vendors for vehicle maintenance want to assure that they are qualified to perform the work and are reputable. When vehicles are leased, it must be clearly stated who is responsible for providing maintenance. The schedule for performing vehicle maintenance must be detailed and performed accordingly.

While an effective maintenance program will afford efficient scheduling of vehicle service, it is important to have procedures in place in the event of vehicle breakdown or discovery of a serious vehicle defect. A vehicle with a known safety defect must never be allowed on the road until repairs have been completed. Placing an out-of-service tag or similar identifier on the vehicle can help to highlight that the vehicle is unavailable for use.

Developing a maintenance program assures that vehicles are properly equipped and maintained. Establishing a recordkeeping system supports the maintenance program.

### Preventive Maintenance

It is essential that a company have a realistic preventive maintenance (PM) program if a vehicle is to give the most economical service possible. The groundwork for a good PM program usually starts with the manufacturer's recommendations concerning necessary maintenance and the time or mileage when it should be performed. These recommendations should be considered minimum requirements and can be modified by the actual experience of the business; however, careful consideration must be given to the maintenance that must be performed in order to meet the requirements of the manufacturer's warranty. PM allows a firm to schedule its repair work so that it is not faced with large fluctuations in work flow (which stabilizes the work force needed).

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Preventive maintenance differs from demand or crisis maintenance in that it attempts to anticipate problems and to plan for their correction before they become serious. PM is normally performed on a mileage or a time basis. Typical jobs that are performed on a routine basis include oil and filter changes, lubrication, tightening of components, engine tune-ups, brake jobs, tire rotation, replacement of specific engine hoses, and radiator maintenance.

The PM interval will vary from one company to another depending on the initial vehicle specifications, the type of operation in which the vehicle is used, and management's appreciation and knowledge of operational costs. A well-defined, consistently applied PM program will result in the lowest total vehicle maintenance cost.

## Demand Maintenance

When maintenance is performed only when the need arises, it is often referred to as demand maintenance. Some vehicle parts are only replaced on a "when failed" basis, such as light bulbs, springs, window glass, wiper blades, wiring, gauges, and seat cushions. Other parts will be replaced or repaired when they are worn and when this wear is detected by periodic inspections, such as tires; engine, transmission and rear-ends; universal joints; bushings; batteries; and fatigued, corroded, or deteriorated structural members. Components necessary for the safe operation of the vehicle should be inspected regularly to assure that a failed condition is detected promptly.

## Crisis Maintenance

If preventive maintenance or demand maintenance is ignored or postponed,

a likely result will be crisis maintenance when a vehicle has a breakdown on the road. A mechanic will have to be dispatched to repair the vehicle and another vehicle may have to be sent to replace the one having problems. In extreme cases, the mechanical failure could cause, either directly or indirectly, an accident. The sudden failure of one item will frequently result in damage to other component parts.

Crisis maintenance is much more expensive than preventive or demand maintenance due to the cost of:

- The driver's downtime.
- Supervisory time expended to organize necessary repair procedures and possibly reroute deliveries.
- The mechanic's time to get to and return from the location of the breakdown (or having an outside garage make the repairs).
- Additional time required due to the inefficiency of a mechanic working on the road versus working at a garage.
- Additional damaged parts.

A company's reputation can also be damaged by customer dissatisfaction if a delivery schedule/appointment is missed.

## Maintenance Records

Every good maintenance program includes a thorough and up-to-date record keeping program. Management cannot guess about maintenance costs and past performance of vehicles or accessories. To be useful, maintenance records must:

- Clearly identify the vehicle.
- Be kept current.
- Only record meaningful data.
- Be reviewed on a periodic basis.

One maintenance record that every motor vehicle operator should use is the driver's vehicle condition report. This report provides direction to the driver in inspecting the vehicle in a systematic manner to help assure that the driver does not overlook any important areas. It also provides a convenient means for the driver to note vehicle deficiencies and to report these to the maintenance department. By keeping a copy of the last vehicle condition report on the vehicle, the driver, mechanic, or other interested parties can ascertain at a glance the known mechanical problems with the vehicle.

There should be a record of all PM and repair work performed on a vehicle. Such a record will allow management to develop needed cost data and to review the past performance of a specific vehicle or group of vehicles. Management can analyze the maintenance work that has been performed on a vehicle to determine if additional

work is necessary or can be expected. The maintenance record can also provide clues to help determine the source of problems that might have been overlooked in routine maintenance, or to identify equipment that is not being operated correctly by a driver.

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