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The importance of dryer maintenance

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Maintenance of your wash is a cost of operation which must be monitored constantly. Savings can be achieved by instituting a routine maintenance schedule.

But that's not technically true, is it? Yet, you wouldn't think of eliminating soap and water, nor would you turn your dryer off to lower costs. Neglecting routine maintenance today forces downtime and replacements tomorrow. More importantly, cutting costs at the expense of customer satisfaction is the most expensive way to operate. Control those costs plus increase revenue while pleasing customers, by operating equipment smartly.

The carwash is part utility and part show. All of the customers descending on your wash look forward to spending minimal time on a mundane chore. They have trolled their part of town and chosen your location for one reason or another. None of them appreciate that fully. The truth is, operators spend countless hours at the wash and can lose track of what a good operation should look like. When the car count is high, it is easy to give the impression you are only there to take the money and run. Maybe your customers aren't always composed of wide-eyed consumers, but they should be.

The customer viewpoint

If they are repeat customers, the small annoyances of poor service build up. Fashion dictates speedy is in, but don't let busy, sunny days transcend into something crazier than a game show. If the property lacks maintenance also, they will eventually decide your wash is not all it's cracked up to be. Do not give them a reason to toss your address permanently. So while time is still left on the clock, try looking through their eyes, know what you have and try to pin down what it is about your location they ought to be appreciating.

That said, appearances do matter and maintenance keeps up those appearances. If the facility and its equipment are grungy, the customer will perceive a high standard of service as improbable. Given the nature of the business — removing grime — customers can make allowances for some facility imperfections; however, they can spot apathy and that translates to poor service. There truly is something disconcerting about a vehicle (whether you are in it or not) disappearing into the murky light of a disgusting tunnel and then believing it will emerge sparkly shiny. Ambiguous at best.

The air dryer is the finishing touch to your service. At this point in the process, hopefully the windows should be clean enough (albeit, wet) for the customer to view the surroundings. The same is true with viewing windows from a full-service lobby. Presentation is everything and a clean, well maintained drying system frames the re-introduction of an improved vehicle to its owner.

Understand the components

Drying equipment, as well as all the wash equipment, needs vigilant routine maintenance to ensure efficient operation and prevent costly downtime and repairs. First and foremost, know and understand the components in your system. This will allow you to establish the proper service schedule and keep a written record of when each service or maintenance check was performed. Failure to maintain the drying system in good condition can result in reduced efficiency and quality of dry, and an increased cost per unit of air moved.

Carwashes are harsh, corrosive environments. Wiring must be protected from this environment by being corrosion resistant, dustproof and waterproof. Periodically, examine wiring and system components for signs of deterioration and loose connections. This includes the motor control center operating the drying system. Check the electrical and thermal overload protection for the motor. If a time-delay is used, its amp capacity should be about 125 percent of the full-load amperage (FLA) shown on the nameplate of the motor. Larger sized over-current protection may permit motor burnout. If the motor is equipped with a reset button overload protection, check to make sure it is not stuck.

All motors should be totally enclosed, and an electrical disconnect may be required within sight of, or in the immediate vicinity of every motor. A motor which is not totally enclosed offers an avenue for moisture penetration and requires routine greasing of the provided zerks. Cast body motors with fins dissipate heat more effectively than rolled motors, thus increasing the life of the motor.

Fan maintenance

A direct-drive fan is mounted directly on the motor shaft and presents the least maintenance. However, if a belt is employed, the routine checking of belt condition is one of the primary, and often over-looked maintenance problems. These must be regularly adjusted or replaced if full air movement is to be achieved, and efficiency maintained.

Knowing and understanding the type of fan and its capabilities is important. One-piece fans, precisely machined and balanced, generally pose little risk. Conversely, fans with welded fins are susceptible to repeated torque stress and the strains of pressure buildup. Sometimes, in an effort to reduce noise, the manufacturer reduces the size of the inlets and outlets. Improperly sized outlets on centrifugal fans increase air backpressure and add stress to both the fan and motor leading to failures; therefore, examining for stress fractures should be part of the routine maintenance.

Should your drying system contain moving parts, i.e. oscillating outlets operated by air cylinders or electronic eyes, special attention needs to be paid. Very often, check the air lines for leaks and the eyes for cleanliness. Staring down the tunnel, customers are keen enough to realize when something is not working properly. Predictably, when consumer's "catch" dysfunctional equipment before they bid farewell, they tend to be more critical of the wash overall.

Check fan housings, air inlets and delivery systems for dirt buildup, blockages and corrosion. Choking off the air supply may lead to poor performance, overheating and failures. Debris inducted in the system will ultimately end up on the vehicle. Following manufacturer's instructions, take the relatively small amount of time required to wash down the exterior of your dryer (and the surrounding area). Remember the dryer provides the visual frame for the exiting, and hopefully clean car.

The "awe" factor

The customer should be in awe of not only the end product, but also of your operation. The obvious things at your facility are aesthetic, but that's not all of it. Friendly, efficient washes delivered in a clean, organized manner trump amusement park glitz any day. It's not hard to love a clean car, but if you need to jumpstart the

sense of wonder in your customers, make it inviting to visit your premises.

So, demonstrate your sense of irrepressible pride by tapping the resources available. Good maintenance is a direct reflection on you and equals smooth sailing operationally. Hopefully, your wash will be successful; the best example of exceptional business practices that appreciative customers will ever have the privilege of knowing.

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