

10 Things You Need to Know About Planned Maintenance

Like an annual trip to your local physician for a check-up, a well thought out Planned Maintenance agreement with a qualified and reputable service company can dramatically increase the longevity of your equipment as well as significantly reduce your operating costs. Conversely, operating forklift equipment without planned maintenance or allowing an inexperienced company manage your program, can result in increased operating costs, downtime and reduced useful life of your forklifts.

Through years of performing planned maintenance for hundreds of companies on thousands of forklifts there are a few basic things we have felt all our customers needed to know about Planned Maintenance and we want to share those topics with you to help you perhaps understand Planned Maintenance more thoroughly, or simply reaffirm the plan you already have in place.

Beware of the “Teaser” – Particularly during times when budgets are strained it is easy to “take the bait” on low-priced introductory PM rates. Statistics show that it takes a minimum of 1 hour to perform a proper PM on an IC or electric rider unit and 30 minutes on a walkie. Ask for the stated hourly labor rate or your prospective provider. If the math doesn’t pan out, something is going to suffer and it’s usually the amount of care paid to your forklifts.

Ask to see a PM inspection form of the company you are using. If one does not exist then it is likely that your forklifts are not being inspected and maintained properly. Have someone do an occasional random inspection to be sure grease is getting where it’s supposed to, and inspections are being done properly. Remember, you spent tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars on these assets and you not only want to get the most out of them in terms of useful life, but your goal is to minimize maintenance costs. The only way to ensure this is to have competent and thorough service technicians service your forklift equipment. Anything less is most likely going to cost you far more in the long-run.

What are completion rates? Do you know how many of your forklifts are being serviced according to the schedule laid out in the agreement? If you are entertaining a new service provider asking for their completion rates is not only appropriate, it’s essential. And if your prospective provider does not know their completion rates, they are not keeping tabs on them, which likely means your forklifts are not going to be serviced on time.

Ask for referrals. You have a lot riding on your forklift fleet every day. Productivity and employee safety are right at the top of the list. There’s no better way to find out what kind of service to expect from your prospective service provider than to ask their current customers. Get a short list of three to four companies and give them a call.

How Planned Maintenance reduces costs – Like the old Fram Oil Filter commercial whose moniker was “you can pay me now, or you can pay me later”, ignoring small costs now leads to bigger costs down the road. But what does that mean and what causes this?

- **Keeping lines clean** – Let's face it, our forklifts operate in less-than-optimal atmospheric conditions. This leads to build-up in the filters that keep the air, oil and hydraulic fluid clean. Sediments can wreak havoc on the internal working parts and result in premature failure, thus increasing your costs over the life of your equipment.
- **Tires** – Tires that are worn or damaged increases the resistance of that tire and leads to increased fuel costs.
- **The squeaky wheel needs the grease** – When a part breaks, a forklift is out of service and typically results in more down time and decreased productivity. Keeping key points properly lubricated reduces friction which reduces wear. This results in smoother operation, improved performance and elongated part life. Combining all these reduces your operating costs.
- **Worn parts** – Replacing worn parts before they fail saves in several ways. When parts fail it can often lead to damage of or failure of other parts. Replacing what's worn now improves up-time and reduces the likelihood of the forklift needing to be taken to the shop for more extensive repairs.

OSHA recommends it – From a safety standpoint, making sure that your forklifts are operating safely is important. As part of OSHA's regulation of forklifts (29CFR 1910), "preventive" or planned maintenance is recommended. Ignoring this recommendation can be costly in the event of a workplace accident due to parts that give way, or an operator that slips on or around the equipment due to lack of maintenance. It's not only the fines that can result, but the legal costs that undoubtedly will be incurred if a company has not followed the recommendations of OSHA.

One size does not fit all – Working with a company that asks questions can optimize and reduce the cost of, your Planned Maintenance program. If your forklifts operate under extreme conditions (lifting heavy loads, in the heat, bad weather, cold storage, multi-shift etc...) they will need increased attention. However if your forklifts are lighter duty and are used less than a full shift, they will not need as frequent visits by your service tech. Knowing how often your forklifts need to be serviced is a product of experience. Be sure your service provider asks questions and listens.

Your operator's responsibility – As required by OSHA, a daily inspection is required of each and every forklift you operate. This daily inspection extends beyond the typically lights, alarms, seat-belt, brakes and accelerator that we frequently see. The required inspection elements include belts and hoses, engine oil level, engine coolant, air filter and brake reservoir to name a few.

Visit your prospective service provider – You can learn a lot by visiting your prospective service provider. How orderly is the parts department? Ask about their processes. Ask to see how they track Planned Maintenance and meet the people that will be responsible for managing your fleet's Planned Maintenance program. Is the facility clean? Are the grounds well kept? A sloppy and disorderly facility usually means you can expect the same for your Planned Maintenance program.

Working with a qualified source – Our experience is that there are few qualified resources in any given city that can execute a proper Planned Maintenance program. You spend tens, sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars to acquire this equipment, why not put it in the hands of a company that understands them and has extensive experience with them. You want someone that you know will be here for the long-haul, and can stand behind the work that they perform. OSHA only requires that a forklift be service by and “authorized” personnel. We feel however that while “authorized” is not defined, you certainly want to be sure that your service company is sufficient to stand the litmus test of having extensive experience to understand the complete spectrum of forklift maintenance.

Midwest Industrial Equipment performs thousands of forklift PM’s every year and we know what it takes to optimize your Planned Maintenance program and would appreciate the opportunity to speak to you about your current program, or help you establish a customized Planned Maintenance program for your forklift fleet.

For more information on Planned Maintenance, or to get a quote for your fleet, contact us in Dayton/Piqua at 877-366-7261 or in Cincinnati at 513-860-1979.