



8 Quick Steps to a Preventive Maintenance Plan

Within a year to 18 months, the costs for your maintenance program will likely increase as your fleet catches up on PM services, but after this initial period, the costs begin to decline and the long-term savings begin to take effect, according to Bill DeWitt, manager, Fleet Advisors of Missouri.

1. Understand the goals of a good PM plan. DeWitt says he reminds fleets that each vehicle should not have to take any trips to the shop outside of scheduled PM checks.

2. Gather all available records for every vehicle and make a file for each vehicle. This can be done on programs like Microsoft Excel. Analyze the purchases by vehicle and also by parts to see if there are particular services in the fleet that need attention.

3. Establish an annual maintenance budget. Greg Buckley, owner, Buckley's Auto Care, says that it's best to have a specific target as to what the budget allows for in each service appointment.

4. If it's clear that you're behind on PM, bring every vehicle into the shop for tire checks, oil changes and anything else the vehicle may need serviced. Continue recording all information, including on-the-road breakdowns.

5. Establish driver and mechanic communication. DeWitt cites that drivers are more likely to be proactive in vehicle maintenance if they feel part of the process.

6. Follow manufacturer recommendations for each vehicle at the start and take fluid samples to make any adjustments. For example, DeWitt was working with a police fleet in Arkansas and found that the transmission fluid's oxidation rate increased significantly right after 50,000 miles. DeWitt said that before making the interval change, the company was spending nearly \$40,000 a year on outside transmission work. And as it turns out, DeWitt says the 50,000-mile mark was the manufacturer recommended interval.

7. Vehicles engaging in extreme periods of idling, operating in salty or dusty areas, traveling on rough terrain, or experiencing any other non-standard use, may need a more aggressive PM plan. For a coal mining fleet, for example, DeWitt switched to an air filtration system with an inner filter that slips inside the standard filter — protecting the engine from the extra dust.

Another air filter recommendation from DeWitt is to install restriction gauges, which judge the amount of restriction in the filter while it's in use. "By using the filter gauge instead of someone's eye to change the filters, you start to change the filters on a real-need basis," he says.

8. As a final note, Buckley says he always tells fleets starting a PM plan that it "all comes down to conversations, expectations and transparency."

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