How vehicle cleanliness can impact a fleet's bottom line

A proper understanding of the costs associated with different washing processes is critical to minimizing expenses, organizational complexity and vehicle downtime

By Fleet Clean USA

Brought to you by Fleet Maintenance
compliments of Fleet Clean

Keeping a fleet's vehicles clean can be an overlooked aspect of maintenance. Putting in the time and effort to address issues of cleanliness can be both challenging and cumbersome, but those fleet managers who are willing to do so help ensure their vehicles look better and last longer.

A lack of vehicle cleanliness can become an issue of safety

Maintenance personnel must make a concerted effort to prioritize cleanliness. Making certain a fleet's vehicles are washed on a regular basis is of the utmost importance, as is including vehicle washing in a fleet's preventive maintenance program. Once a schedule is established, implemented and followed, fleet managers should find washing becomes just another component of regular maintenance and the results of the cleaning process get better with time.

» **Properly addressing all of the outdoor elements a truck is exposed to helps prevent unwanted corrosion and extends a vehicle's lifespan.**

Photo courtesy of Fleet Clean USA

KEY BENEFITS

Increases Life of Vehicles

Ensuring cleanliness by addressing all of the outdoor elements a truck is exposed to helps prevent corrosion and allows for other maintenance and repair work to be conducted with greater ease.

Whether it is salt and sludge in the winter, pollen in the spring or insects in the summer, being regularly subjected to outdoor elements can ruin a vehicle's paint. However, regular washing can efficiently and effectively deal with them and ensure a truck looks better and lasts longer.

Aids with Maintenance

Addressing potential problems with a vehicle and attending to maintenance issues is much less difficult when a vehicle is kept clean. For example, spotting oil leaks and engine issues becomes a tougher task when maintenance personnel cannot see a vehicle's engine casing and components.

Ensures Safety

Depending on the application in which the vehicle is used, a lack of cleanliness can become an issue of safety and lead to significant vehicle downtime. On refuse trucks, for example, keeping vehicles clean and free of debris is part of a fleet's safety plan. One common problem in the garbage collection business is trash can fly out of a truck's dumpster and get trapped on top of the engine and around the engine compartment, which can cause serious mechanical problems or even disable the vehicle.

Aesthetics and Reputation

A fleet comprised of clean, good-looking vehicles can help boost a company's image and improve its bottom line.

Cleaner, more aesthetically pleasing vehicles can also serve to positively impact a company's reputation — both among its own drivers and maintenance personnel, as well as the general public. Putting in the time and effort to keep vehicles clean — both inside and out — can go a long way toward ensuring a fleet company's employees can take pride in the vehicles they operate or maintain. Doing so may also help a fleet retain drivers and, with the significant shortage of qualified individuals willing to – and capable of – operating a commercial vehicle, this factor cannot be ignored.

Arriving at a customer's destination with a properly washed and cleaned vehicle can help improve customer retention, and clean trucks are less likely to be stopped and cited for various maintenance and safety violations.

Compliance

FSMA

The passage of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), which was signed into law by then-President Barack Obama in early January of 2011, serves to make certain the food supply in the U.S. is safe through proactive measures instead of reactive efforts.

The act requires any carrier transporting food — be it for animals or humans — to keep their trailers sanitary. However, the FSMA does not provide any guidance on how often food carriers should address the cleanliness of their trailers, or with what means they should use to keep them sanitary. What the legislation does stipulate, though, is transporters of food must log both their cleaning processes and when they have been conducted in detail and be prepared to disclose the documentation upon inspection by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The requirements of the FSMA are yet another reason why fleet managers — and more specifically, those that manage fleets transporting food — must make vehicle cleanliness a priority and establish a schedule for addressing it as part of a preventive maintenance program.

» **The requirements of the recently passed Food Mondernization Act should compel fleet managers overseeing trucks that transport food to place an emphasis on cleanliness.**

Photo courtesy of Fleet Clean USA

Associate cleanliness with preventive maintenance

EPA

Proper recovery and disposal of water used to clean vehicles is also a key consideration for fleet managers.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires wash water be reclaimed so it does not end up polluting nearby land and water. As a result, the fleet owner needs to be sure wash water is collected and disposed of properly. This means it must not go into a storm drain, or runoff to the ground. It must be disposed of by special permit from a permitted, publicly-owned treatment works at a water treatment plant or in a sanitary sewer.

Fleet managers must be aware of the importance of employing a wash vendor that is in possession of a permit to dispose of the water properly. Doing so is critical to staying in compliance with EPA guidelines and ensuring wash water is being handled appropriately.

FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

Emphasizing the importance of keeping a fleet's vehicles clean affects a company's bottom line. As a result, having a strong understanding of the different processes by which trucks can be washed and the costs associated with them is critical to minimizing expenses and organizational complexity, as well as maximizing vehicle uptime.

Fleets have several options for keeping vehicles clean: in-house wash bays, in-house employee washers, stationary truck washes and mobile vendors. There are advantages and disadvantages to employing each of them.

On-Site Wash Bays

While on-site wash bays offer fleets the convenience of being set up to effectively clean vehicles and properly recover and dispose water, they can be expensive for fleets to maintain.

In addition, fleet managers need to hire and train employees to manage both the vehicle and the wash process.

VEHICLE WASHING COSTS

	Tractor Wash
Mobile Vendor	**$10-$25***
In-House Wash Bay	**$50.92**
Hourly Employee/Washer (one @ 40 hrs. @ $12)	
CDL Driver (.5 hr. per truck @ $20/hr.)	
Worker's Comp ($3 per $1,000 payroll)	
Soap	
Supplies/Equipment	
Maintenance and Repair (estimate $10,000 annually)	
Water	
Sewer/Oil Water Separator ($500/mo)	
Capex ($150,000 - over five years)	
In-House Washers	**$35.82**
Hourly Employees (two @30 hrs. @ $12)	
Worker's Comp.	
Soap	
Supplies/Equipment	
Fuel	
Equipment (annual cost of $8,000 for purchase and maintenance)	
Water Reclaim and Disposal	
Truck Wash (from Blue Beacon website)	**$63 - $85***
Driver's Time (1 hr./vehicle @ $20)	
Unit ($43-$65)	

Does not include taxes and extra fees.

Cost comparison is based on washing 50 tractors per week

» Figure 1

> Maintain a regular wash schedule to maximize uptime

On-Site Employee Washers

When utilizing on-site employees to wash vehicles, fleets stand to benefit from the fact that it is more cost effective than operating an on-site wash bay. While the fleet still has control over the wash process, acquiring, training, managing and retaining employees to clean the trucks can be both time-consuming and complex.

Stationary Truck Wash

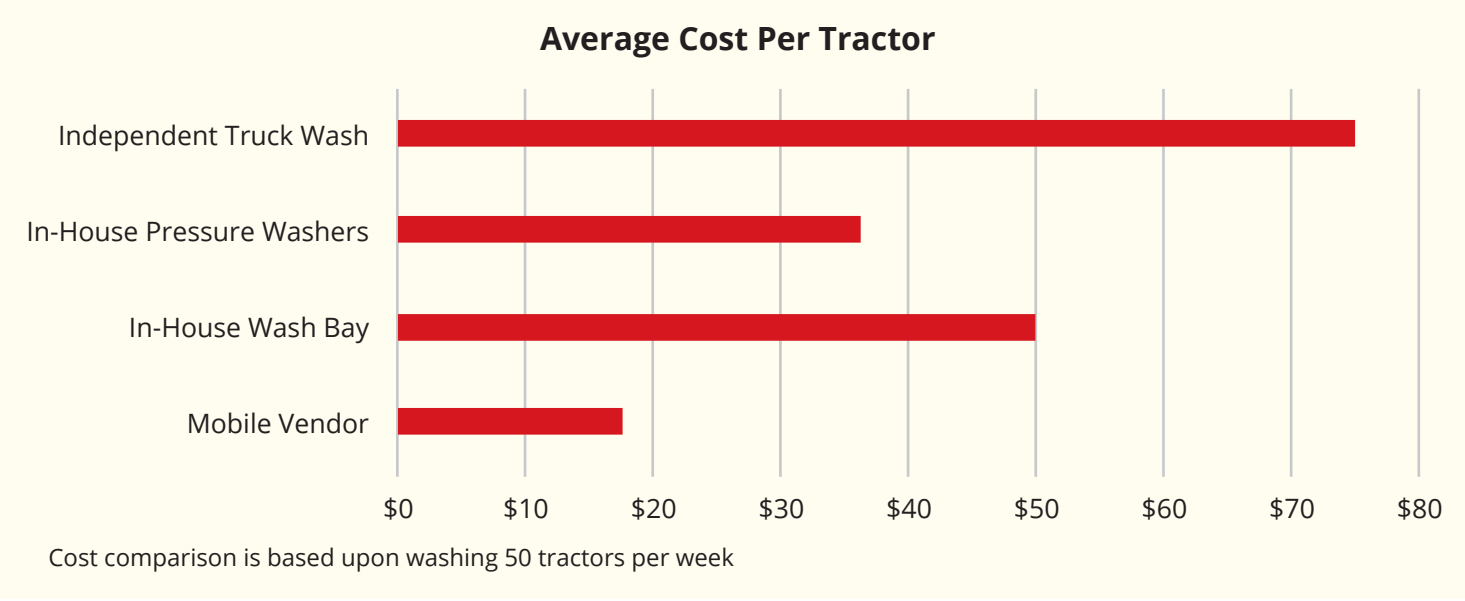
Using a stationary truck wash to clean vehicles is quite expensive, as it requires both paying to use it and compensate a driver to transport the vehicle to its location. Furthermore, if the truck's operator is being paid by the mile, he or she will most likely not appreciate the downtime associated with the vehicle cleaning process.

Mobile Vendor

Though fleets cede control of managing the wash process to another company, employing a mobile vendor allows for the potential to wash between 60 and 80 vehicles at a time, making it the most cost-effective option for fleets (See Figure 1 and Figure 2).

MAINTAINING A SCHEDULE

Some fleet managers are more adept at maintaining a regular wash schedule than others, for a number of reasons. Vehicles are often on the move from one place to another, and certain factors — breakdowns, traffic and weather, among others — stand to prevent them from arriving at their respective destinations on time. Even when vehicles



» Figure 2

are in the shop for maintenance and repair, it can still be difficult to determine when, where and how they were last cleaned. While advancements in technology have led to the development of software designed to assist fleets in the management of vehicle cleanliness, many fleets have yet to invest in it. Furthermore, even if an investment is made, personnel is still required to both properly utilize the software and effectively oversee the cleaning process.

TAKEAWAYS

Cleaner, more aesthetically pleasing vehicles can serve to positively impact a company's reputation — both among its own drivers and maintenance personnel, as well as the general public. Putting in the time and effort to keep vehicles clean — both inside and out — can go a long way toward ensuring a fleet owner's employees can take pride in the vehicles they operate or maintain. In addition, arriving at a customer's destination with a properly washed and cleaned vehicle can help improve customer retention.

The importance of keeping the vehicles in a fleet clean cannot be overstated. Doing so requires an investment of time, money and effort, but the benefits of having long-lasting, professional-looking trucks with a longer lifespan are well worth it. Prioritizing cleanliness and associating it with preventive maintenance, as well as establishing a schedule to ensure vehicles are washed on a regular basis helps prevent expensive and unwanted corrosion, allows for various other maintenance and repair jobs to be conducted with greater ease, boosts a company's overall image and helps improve its bottom line.

Fleet Clean USA is a mobile fleet washing service with locations throughout the United States.

FLEET CLEAN®

Fleet Clean USA
2251 Sarno Rd., Melbourne, FL 32935
(877) 477-9274