Training notes from the woods
& the classroom

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Skidder Maintenance

By Lee Schauman

Last month we talked generally about machine maintenance, and how important preventive maintenance programs are. This month we want to talk specifically about skidder maintenance, and how preventive/routine maintenance is so important in keeping the machine on the job. With machines becoming more and more sophisticated each year, it makes sense we do everything we can to take care of routine and preventive maintenance issues on time and on schedule, because we all know that ignoring required maintenance today means more problems down the road.

Here is a list of items that can be the basis for your preventive/routine maintenance program. Obviously, each machine is unique, and knowing your machine will help you add to this list based on the type of machine you have:

1. Conduct a daily circle check before operating your skidder, and in the evening when you park it. Check tires/track systems, engine compartments for unusual symptoms such as oil/fluid leaks, muffler issues; check hydraulics, booms or towers for obvious cracks or damage, any loose or missing nuts or bolts, fluid levels, broken or exposed wiring, and any other items unique to your machine. A check at night might spot something you can bring repair parts for the next morning, helping you reduce downtime.
2. Follow your manufacturer's recommendations for starting and shutting down your equipment to optimize efficiency and operating life of the machine.
3. Perform operator checks while seated in the operator's seat with the engine running and maximum visibility. Check gauges and move controls manually to insure all parts are properly functioning. If there's anything abnormal, repair it immediately to minimize damage and downtime.
4. Before moving equipment conduct a visual inspection of the area to insure that no one or nothing is in the way.
5. When parking machine for long periods, use proper shut down procedures and lower or place all devices in their parked position. Deactivate controls if possible so no one can accidentally create unexpected movement of the devices even though the machine isn't running. OSHA requires that if you leave your immediate machine area, the machine must be shut down and off. It is a violation of OSHA standards to leave a machine running while unattended.
6. Maintain equipment by properly lubricating the machine, including greasing, adding fluids when necessary, and checking appropriate reservoirs on a regular required basis.

7. Clear all debris from engine compartments and around exhaust systems regularly. Those are areas where most fires begin. Keep walking surfaces free of debris and oil/grease to prevent falls or slips. One of the most common injuries to mechanized operation personnel are slips and falls with resulting strains and sprains.
8. To prevent electrical fires, do a routine inspection of wiring harnesses, grommets where wires are run through machine frames, etc. Bare or rubbed wires can short and start fires, especially if the machine isn't kept free of oil and debris. Don't rely on fuses to blow to prevent electrical fires.

Taking these steps can be a great start to your preventive/routine maintenance program. But tailor it to your particular machine, because more steps may be required. What your goal should be is to have an efficient operation that protects operators and workers on the crew.

Operate Safe!

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Minnesota Logger Education Program
Dave Chura, Executive Director
301 W 1st Street; Suite 510
Duluth, MN 55802
218-722-5442 · dchura@mlep.org · www.mlep.org