



## Maintenance of cleaning equipment

From Volume 45, Issue 5 - May 2008

### Contractor Success

Expert offers tips to maintain durable machinery.

*by: Michael Schaffer*

Every day we hear something — usually not positive — about the U.S. economy.

It's got people on edge, and just about everyone who has not already been affected is wondering if the downturn will impact their jobs and businesses.

When things get tough, or potentially tough, many business owners, including building service contractors (BSCs), look for ways to cut costs.

One way BSCs can potentially cut expenses is to know how to better maintain and even perform light repairs on the cleaning equipment they use every day — specifically, vacuum cleaners, the mainstay machine of our industry, and floor machines, nearly as important.

Fortunately, vacuum cleaners and floor machines are more dependable and durable today than those made a decade ago.

However, they do have moving parts and they tend to get a lot of use — and abuse — by cleaning workers, which means eventually they will need some attention and repair.

Some repairs you can do yourself, which will help you save a few bucks.

Others will require taking the machine back to your distributor's repair shop.

But some of these tips may postpone those visits and their costs.

### Floor machines

When one building service contractor was first starting his business, he purchased a used 175-rpm "buffer" floor machine.

Twenty years later, he still has the machine, and it has never once seen the inside of a service repair shop.

With proper care, including proper storage in a clean and dry area, a buffer can provide years of service.

However, most BSCs should expect a buffer to last about 10 to 15 years and to need some repair work during that time.

For the most part, these are hardy machines, although the motor may need to be replaced after several years of service.

This is a complicated process and should not be undertaken by a BSC.

To keep matters from becoming worse, as soon as a motor-related problem is detected, stop using the machine.

It's when we are working with more sophisticated machines, such as autoscrubbers, that repair and maintenance can become more complicated.

One of the big concerns with floor machines has little to do with the mechanicals, but involves the squeegees found on the back of the machine.

During operation, the squeegees help gather and remove moisture along with soil, lint, hair and other debris in the cleaning process.

Some of this matter can cause the squeegees to rip or develop small tears, which can affect the performance of the machine and the appearance of the floors.

Dirty, torn or uneven squeegees can produce streaks and lines on a clean floor.

Frequently check the squeegees and replace as needed.

With the development of more world-class floor machines, which are more service-friendly for users, accessing and changing the squeegees has become easier.

Always check behind the floor machine's pads or, if the machine is using cylindrical brush technology, its cylinders.

These areas can be magnets for objects and debris, which can also impede the machine's performance.

If items are caught on the brushes, simply remove them to minimize further maintenance problems.

Some autoscrubbers have acid-cell or gel batteries.

All that is required to maintain acid-cell batteries is adding distilled water as the water evaporates.

This means users should regularly check the water levels.

Also, carefully follow filling instructions.

Care is needed to make sure no acid is spilled onto carpets or floors.

Gel batteries cost more money than acid batteries; however, they require little maintenance.

Make sure the machine stays well-lubricated.

Certain areas, such as the joints of some machines, need regularly scheduled oil and lubrication applications.

This is a task that users may or may not be able to perform on their own depending on the machine and model.

### **Vacuum cleaners**

Remember the BSC mentioned earlier who had the same buffer for more than 20 years?

He was not quite so lucky when it came to vacuum cleaners.

In fact, he viewed vacuum cleaners as a "disposable" cleaning tool.

He selected inexpensive and often rebuilt machines and disposed of them as soon as they needed repair.

That can be penny-wise and pound-foolish.

If well cared for, a higher-quality commercial vacuum cleaner will last three to five years, possibly longer.

One of the first ways to keep a vacuum cleaner up and running is to simply change the bag.

As the bag fills, the machine becomes less effective and puts strain on the motor(s).

A good idea is to simply change the bag every day if the machine is used more than a few hours per day.

Likewise, clean the filters.

Almost all high-end machines as well as many of the new generation of "essential" vacuum cleaners — machines that focus on maximizing worker productivity, cost savings, and durability — require the filters to be maintained on a regular basis for the vacuum to be effective and high performing.

A big no-no with vacuum cleaners is to vacuum up liquid.

Once moisture is absorbed into the machine, a variety of components from motors to hoses can be harmed.

Moisture causes dirt and dust to cling to the sides of hoses, limiting the machine's performance.

It can also cause mold and mildew as well as odor problems, all of which can negatively impact the machine and the indoor environment.

Along these lines, users should always be aware of what they are vacuuming up and what gets into the machine.

Coins, paper clips and other items can get stuck in the machine, cause a strain on the motor, or damage belts.

A signal that moisture, an object or just wear and tear is beginning to take its toll on a machine is when the machine starts getting louder.

This can be a sign of motor wear, with more serious problems soon to come.

Stop, access what is user-accessible, and see if the problem can be detected and corrected in-house.

If not, a service call may be required.

Also, the beater bar needs to be regularly checked and cleaned.

If it is covered with lint and debris, the machine cannot adequately perform, and vacuuming efficiency will be marginalized.

Of course, the belts on a vacuum cleaner are expected to last for only a limited time.

If you are in the market for a new vacuum cleaner, select a machine that allows easy access to the belt holding so that the belts can be quickly and easily changed.

### **Remember the manual**

Remember the book that came with the machine?

Often the owner's manual that comes with the new floor machine or vacuum cleaner ends up getting tossed with the packaging.

There is important information in there, and it is well worth the extra 20 minutes necessary to read the manual, especially the troubleshooting guide.

Most manufacturers know their equipment well and know what may break down, when, why and whether it can be fixed by the user or needs a service professional.

When problems develop, a review of the troubleshooting guide can help explain what is

happening, why it is happening, and what you should do about it.

Usually, cleaning professionals are focused more on cleaning than on the care of the equipment they use.

As a result, floor machines and vacuum cleaners can really be put through some challenges.

Instructing users to show more care for the machines, inspecting the machines regularly, and attending to them at the first sign that a problem may be developing can prevent downtime, cut repair bills, and add years of useful life to your cleaning equipment.

---

*Michael Schaffer is president of Tornado®, a manufacturer of professional cleaning equipment, such as vacuum cleaners, floor machines, and extractors. He may be reached by calling 1-800-VACUUMS.*