

The Importance of a Proper Lubrication Program

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Proper lubrication is essential to maintaining the bottom line, but starting a lubrication plan can seem to be an overwhelming proposition. Not having an effective program can result in hundreds of hours of downtime and lost production. Where does one begin when faced with such a daunting task? This article will discuss methods to implement a comprehensive lubrication program, or how to possibly improve one already in place.

Define Your Objectives

The first thing that should be done is to define the program's goals and objectives. Many plants want to consolidate inventory, reduce costs, and to ensure that the correct products are being used in the right places, especially in regard to any applicable legislation or food grade lubrication requirements. A qualified lubrication expert can assist with each of these goals, and advise you on what may or may not be a practical plan based on their experience. Failure to finish off each associated part of the master plan for a proper lubrication program may ultimately result in the collapse of the entire effort. Beware the temptation of setting a long list of goals, and then trying to achieve them all at once. This urge to make a giant impact all at once fails far more often than not. With short term, achievable goals for a lubrication program, there is a much better chance for success, especially in those cases where a large number of employees necessarily need to be involved. Plant maintenance, lubrication in particular, is an area where there is often a great resistance to change. Involving a knowledgeable lubrication engineer at the outset of a program and fundamental lubrication training are effective ways to break this resistance to change.

Small Goals

Once the focus of the program has been scaled back, the best course of action is to go after the most relatively easy to imple-

ment items first. Accomplishing these can give the overall program a sense of momentum. The goal here is to cross something off of the to-do list.

Even a seemingly small accomplishment can be crucial. Some examples might include consolidating multiple gear oils into a single one, inventory reduction, or identifying an opportunity to save money through the advantages of using a superior lubricant. A few successes like these along the way help to keep the ball rolling.

Implementing a color-coding plan, tagging equipment, and employee training are also smaller sized goals that can be accomplished fairly quickly with a moderate effort and reap much larger benefits in the long term. Another example of this is oil analysis. Oil analysis can be a good place to start, because it can be started on critical equipment without a lot of effort, and carries with it a potentially large return on the initial investment. This is because something as simple as taking an oil sample periodically can be the difference between literally thousands of dollars in unplanned downtime, or in getting a new gearbox installed while a line is down. Having no unplanned downtime for gearbox failures after implementing an oil analysis program is the kind of result that gets noticed, and attracts resources with which to implement more programs.

Intermediate Goals

Intermediate goals are also important, but keep in mind that the larger the number of ongoing projects, the easier it is to become distracted. Avoid the trap where a lubricant survey turns into a project to name or assign asset numbers to everything in the plant.

Another potential distraction is to start adding related projects that are well intentioned, but are complete projects in their own rights. Reliability mag-

azines, websites, and conferences are all competing for attention to highlight the latest in reliability technology and trends. It is far too easy to get caught up in these trends and buzzwords.

The same goes for vibration and other emerging technologies as well. Many of these are perfectly wonderful technologies, and may also belong in a maintenance program, but it becomes all too easy to meander into trying to implement these technologies, or other detours which take the focus and energy away from finishing the lubrication program. However well intentioned, going off on a tangent will destroy all momentum and result in not fully accomplishing either goal.

The use of a series of intermediate steps serves to focus everyone's efforts into something that generates tangible and visible benefits, and is the most effective way to begin a program. With each small part of the project that is completed, employees become more invested in the continuance of the program as it builds towards the conclusion — a comprehensive lubrication program that saves money in the long run. The possibility exists that lubricant inventories can be cut, overall lubricant consumption can be cut, and costly mistakes eliminated, thereby making the workplace a safer and more efficient environment. **IMPO**

