

4 Tips to Keep Your Motors Runnin'



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Don't risk breakdowns in this longest season ever

Thanks to this season's early start, landscape equipment and their power sources have been working overtime, and they've got at least several more weeks of duty to perform. Contractors' in-season engine maintenance is even more critical to ensure equipment keeps working so that every last cent of revenue is captured in this unusually long season.



Remember, you're only providing services to your clients and making money when your equipment is running properly.

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"Downtime for people in this industry is so unproductive, and it's crucial that their equipment be in good condition when they need it," says Wayne Russell, Briggs & Stratton national sales and service manager. "Downtime is the absolute taboo to their business."

Follow these four simple strategies to keep engines healthy and keep production in high gear.

1 Protect the fuel: When a piece of equipment isn't functioning properly, it's most likely the fuel is to blame.

"Seventy-five percent of failures we see in the marketplace are fuel-related. That's a fact," Russell says. Fuel can cause a variety of issues, primarily because it's corrosive. The ethanol in gasoline contains harsh metals and solvents, and these components naturally corrode the engine's carburetor.



To combat corrosion, add fuel stabilizers and fuel treatments any time fresh fuel is purchased. Fuel treatments have metal deactivators that combat

corrosion and water-dispersion agents that coat water molecules found in the gas tank. These agents prevent water from separating from the gasoline and allow a proper burn through the combustion system. Additional cleaning agents in the fuel treatment keep the engine valves working efficiently by preventing carbon build-up.

Treatments are especially important on pieces of equipment that aren't used every day, like sod cutters, leaf blowers and dethatchers.

2 Start every day with a visual inspection: A quick visual inspection every morning before equipment heads out into the field may be the most-important preventative maintenance step that a contractor can make.

"Two minutes of inspection in the morning can save you two days of downtime," Russell says. "Just give it a once over. Are the air cleaner covers tight? Make sure there isn't any debris on the unit and eyeball for oil leaks. It's that simple."

Mark Nelson, Briggs & Stratton technical trainer, says contractors should have a simple daily checklist they follow each morning:

- Check the oil level daily, and don't forget the hydraulic oil on ZTRs.
- Keep the cooling system clear and clean. Don't let it get packed full of grass, dirt and debris, which is common in the dry summer months when dirt and debris are at their highest levels.
- Look for leaks under the piece of equipment if it's kept on a trailer or in a storage area.
- Visually inspect any belts for wear and tear as well as belt tension.

3 Change the oil and filter: Being diligent on oil changes – every 100 hours of operation for larger equipment; every 50 hours for smaller utility pieces of equipment that may not be used daily – can prevent major damage.

Preventing any dirt and debris from entering the engine and mixing with the oil is nearly impossible. But if it's not changed out regularly, the aging oil and dirt will form a thick, gooey substance like tar that can't flow through oil passageways or lubricate the engine.

An oil filter is an inexpensive, but critical engine component to ensure peak performance and durability. "When you change the oil, change the oil filter for \$8," Russell says. "You'll come out ahead every time, I promise you."

4 Keep the engine's lungs clear: The engine air filter should be changed every 100 to 250 hours, depending on how dirty the environment is in which you're working. A contractor should pull off the air cleaner cover on the engine and clean off grass clippings and thatch that has collected daily.

A clogged or old air filter will restrict air flow and adversely affect the air-fuel mixture. This will result in decreased horsepower, poor fuel economy, slow response, tough starting and, ultimately, shorter engine life.

"Think of an engine as a human being. That air filter is the lungs. If it can't breathe, it can't run," Russell says.

Obviously, access to air and oil filters are different from engine model to engine model. Briggs and Stratton Vanguard engines offer a Cooler Cleaner package that allows for a large volume of air to go over the engine cylinders' heads. A flywheel screen is constructed at an orientation that efficiently chops grass and chaff to help debris pass through the cooling fins and not collect and cause potential problems.

While proper care of equipment power sources requires a level of constant attention, simple preventative maintenance measures can stop larger problems before they occur that might sideline a piece of equipment indefinitely. And, in a season that will see more hours of cutting than in recent seasons, taking care of a fleet's engines is even more important, Russell says.

"If the engine is maintained correctly, it will last as long as the piece of equipment lasts."

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