

WHY PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE REDUCES RISK

January-2016

By – J. Olivier

More than 25 years of experience and currently the Director at The High Option Ltd.

After publishing a series of articles, I wish to continue the series on why and how properly implemented Preventative Maintenance Systems can save you money, create a safer operating environment for your drivers, and reduce your risk of accidents and breakdowns.



Not long ago, an accident occurred in which two young adults lost their lives, just outside the turn-off to the King Shaka Airport in Durban. Sadly, the couple drove into the back of a broken down truck which was parked inside the emergency lane. Whatever might have been the cause of the accident, it cannot be denied that the presence of the truck at that specific location, at that specific time, contributed to the accident occurring. If the truck wasn't there, the potential exists that the accident would not have occurred. This follows then that if the truck did not break down, it would not have been there either.



Many of these accidents take place throughout the year, in all parts of our beautiful country. You cannot drive from Durban to Johannesburg on the N3 without seeing a number of trucks that have broken down and have been immobilized next to the road, caused a hazard to other road users. In a perfect world, no truck will break down, but this is South Africa, where proper maintenance of vehicles often appear to be sacrificed for the sake of monetary gain and increased profits. Untrained, poorly educated drivers, poorly maintained vehicles, poor regulatory controls over driving periods, and a cluster of other issues crowd the environment in which our goods are transported from A to B. And we, as other road users, are all at risk.

So where does Preventative Maintenance play a role in this industry? How can it make a difference, and what role can it play towards creating a safer operating environment?

It is often quoted that 70% of all heavy goods vehicle accidents are due to driver error. I disagree. I believe that this statistic is misleading, because it only refers to the actions of the driver while he is actually in control of the vehicle. There are other hidden factors where the driver is, or should be involved, which then cause accidents where components fail and results in an accident. In these cases, equipment failure is listed as the cause of the accident, but in many cases, the failure of the equipment is directly linked to poor maintenance systems, and the driver of the truck should in all cases be part of the maintenance system of the truck. This involvement of the driver could be as comprehensive as possible, to the extent that he must co-sign the service record and serviceability record of the vehicle before using it, or it could be limited to a basic inspection that satisfies him that the vehicle is safe for use.

Any preventative maintenance system worth its salt must include the driver in the process. This will perform two functions, each complimenting the other.



In the first place, it will be educational, and will teach the driver some of the more basic functions of specific components of the vehicle, enabling him to provide better information to technicians when stranded next to the road when the truck breaks down. In many cases, running a basic diagnostic can provide clues as to the true nature of the defect. In some cases it may even equip the driver to be able to perform a basic repair, with permission, and getting the vehicle to a point where more detailed and precise diagnostics can be performed and repairs executed.

Secondly, a driver with some basic education on the functions of components would be in a better position to provide data to service and repair technicians who has to attend to a breakdown substantial distances from



it's base. This will allow technicians to be more accurate in their guestimations as to what is actually wrong, often resulting in having the correct spares and tools available when they arrive on scene. This saves time and money.

The inspection routine that is implemented as part of a proper Preventative Maintenance System is far more detailed than that provided by the manufacturer, in terms of the recommended servicing schedule. As mentioned in a previous article, few service centers have the manpower to properly follow those inspection routines due to the pressure to get vehicles in and out of the workshop in as short a period as possible. However, Preventative Maintenance forces drivers and technicians to look at specifics on the vehicle, and to actively seek out defects and potential problems, addressing them before they end up being an expensive repair, or possibly the cause of an accident and resultant losses, including loss of life. The financial benefits of being on time all the time cannot be denied, and proper PMS offers this.

Preventative maintenance does not take the place of recommended maintenance procedures and servicing schedules as provided by manufacturers, or as instituted by fleet owners and managers. It is complimentary to these systems, and it enhances their efficiency, and streamlines the processes that will result in reliable vehicles with well equipped and better trained drivers to transport our goods from all corners of our country.

The benefits of PMS is not immediately apparent, until you understand the real role that it plays, and the potential it has for saving money, saving lives and playing a serious and major role in increasing efficiency within the transport industry.