



# STORING & CLEANING EQUIPMENT

**C**leanliness gets linked to good outcomes, as illustrated in the familiar words attributed to popularization by John Wesley, the founder of Methodism: “Cleanliness is, indeed, next to godliness.”

Yet one need not link attention to cleanliness and the highest power to understand the significance. Order is its own, earthly reward.

Time spent maintaining equipment—keeping it clean and storing it properly—brings big returns. When

a contractor reaches for a machine or a hose or a wand, searching and last-minute fixes are avoided because the part is exactly where it should be and in excellent condition. Better still, the shortest interval between readying for and starting a job is realized. A contractor does not earn money by trying to find equipment or by pausing to repair it while at a job site.

Method counts in other ways, as well. For every contractor who parks a truck on a residential or commercial street, there are tens of passersby who

take a good look inside an open back or side-panel door. When the curious citizens see order, they are confident the contractor is a professional one. Many contractors do not have brick and mortar showrooms. Their mobile unit and their job-site setup and activity substitute as a showroom.

Disorder speaks for itself. So much so, that when we approached contractors and distributors about talking with us on this topic, they considered the protocol for keeping equipment maintained and stored properly so

basic to business that they could not imagine commenting. It is as simple as being able to walk and chew gum at the same time, explained one, as he laughed at the notion of a contractor not getting it. He concluded that the topic is so fundamental anyone that has not internalized it will have a short tenure in the industry.

So suppose everyone does get it. There is always going to be the day—a long, hot day or an especially cold and vexing one—when a contractor ends a job and just wants to close the doors of a vehicle or a garage and forget about everything work-related until the next day. That is the time to summon up extra energy by recalling what it is that keeps a business on course.

Pride sums it all up nicely. Consider it an acronym with built-in reminders of why it pays to take the time to store and clean equipment with attention to detail.

#### **Pride**

Take the initial letters of the words prevention, readiness, integrity, direction, and expectation to build the word pride; and use the word as a handy summation of why we invest in order as a sound business process. Pride begins with *prevention*, and we know that an ounce of that offsets a much weightier cure.

Put a piece of equipment away with a failing gasket, missing screw, or a breached seal and it will be there in the same condition the next time it is put in service. It will also be ready to fail and possibly cause harm to its operator or damage to structures.

Every piece of equipment should be stored clean and in good working order. If it requires any maintenance that must be postponed, it should be tagged for non-use until it can be repaired with the required repair noted.

*Readiness* depends on equipment that is maintained and then, stored in a systematic way. Cords and hoses should not be twisted or tangled, as that will reduce their longevity. Fuses, screws, and other small components

should be sorted and stored in separate, clearly-labeled units.

With clarity and accessibility as the guiding principles, developing a storage system for equipment becomes easier. A chart of the layout of materials will enable all employees to be sure they are using the same arrangement.

*Integrity* of equipment that is clean and properly maintained translates into reliability. Downtime on jobsites is reduced to a minimum.

*Direction* is also bolstered. By modeling good practices with cleaning and maintenance of equipment, a contractor ensures that employees know what is expected of them.

*Expectation* has more than one dimension. It includes what a contractor requires of himself and his employees. It also includes the requirements established by regulators. Clean, well-maintained equipment is an integral part of a safe workplace. And the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) exists to ensure that employers provide a safe workplace.

#### **Ancillaries**

The pride a contractor reflects in cleaning and storing equipment carries over to all aspects of the workplace. It reduces the prospect of injuries on the job and in the shop or garage. For instance, if equipment is stored precariously and falls on or trips an employee, it spawns what should have been avoidable problems.

Storage areas—whether in vehicles, garages, or shops—should be clean themselves. Debris or dirt can invite rodents that do damage. Removing corrugated material is especially important because it not only provides a habitat for pests, but it is also a fire hazard.

When setting up shelves, make certain they are suitable for the weight they must bear. Similarly, cabinets

should have a center of gravity that guarantees they will not tip over.

Chemicals should be stored at floor level to the fullest extent possible. And any chemical that causes an immediate danger by a spill should be at the floor level.

If equipment is no longer serviceable, get rid of it or store it separately from work-a-day machines. The same applies to parts.

Obviously, all the same guidance applies to vehicles. A truck carrying

For a contractor or distributor, the layout of equipment in a truck or a garage or shop, can contribute to a safe workplace. Accessible machinery and tools prevent trips and falls, as well as injury from falling objects.

a contractor's logo that breaks down on a city street is a poor advertisement. But it is also a liability. Regular attention to brakes, belts, tires, batteries, and heating and cooling system will promote road safety and enhance business.

#### **Method**

Pride is where it begins. But the components of the acronym must be matched by practice. An employee that misuses or mistreats a machine or a vehicle can undo everything in an instant.

Cleaning and storing equipment properly will be impossible if employees refuse to do what is required of them. Training employees is a must. They need instruction in how to operate equipment and the importance of not deviating from a manufacturer's guidelines.

Part of employee training includes teaching an employee not only how to use machines, but also how to inspect them regularly. They should



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be able to recognize problems and get machines and parts in the repair queue.

An employee that cannot be enlisted in the proper cleaning and storage of equipment will probably contribute to the negative forces on the business in other ways, most notably safety. A key to safety, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) at the Centers for Disease Control, is the design of a workplace.

For a contractor or distributor, the layout of equipment in a truck or a garage or shop, can contribute to a safe workplace. Accessible machinery and tools prevent trips and falls, as well as injury from falling objects. The NIOSH Prevention through Design (PtD) program offers many good ideas to businesses seeking additional and low-cost ways to promote health and safety in the workplace. Learn more about the program by starting at [www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ptd](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ptd). *or*

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