

By Gary Wirges

# Self-Service Car Wash Maintenance

**S**elf-service car wash maintenance is similar to the maintenance of other businesses. The car wash facility should be approached from the perspective of the customer. The car wash should remain aesthetically appealing and in good working condition at all times. The best way to ensure the car wash remains in good working order is to invest in quality equipment and perform regular maintenance.

Self-service car wash maintenance requirements may be classified as preventive or required. Preventive maintenance is proactive, and is performed on a schedule to reduce equipment breakdowns. Required maintenance is reactive, and occurs in the event of an



**Above:** Bays should be washed down daily.

equipment failure, making the equipment inoperable or dangerous at which point service must be performed.

A maintenance schedule should be posted in the car wash equipment room and kept current. It should include a list of tasks, the previous date the task was performed, the current date and initials of technician currently performing the task.

## PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE

### Maintenance to be Performed Daily

- Wash down bay(s)
- Test each bay meter by inserting coin, token, credit card, and/or bill as applicable to ensure acceptance and smooth operation
- Pick up debris and empty trash receptacles
- Initiate bay cycle, verify proper pressure, inspect for leaks and operation

- Activate vacuums, test suction, inspect hose(s) and attachment(s)
- Operate bill changer, check bill acceptance and proper change
- Test vendors for coin/bill acceptance and activation
- Examine oil level and condition of pumps
- Examine oil level and condition of air compressor
- Check chemical levels

### Maintenance to be Performed Weekly

- Empty vacuum debris bins and clean dust filters
- Sweep or wash-down paved surfaces
- Maintain landscaping and/or lawn
- Measure residue level in sediment traps
- Drain condensed water from air compressor tank (if applicable)
- Check 24-hour timers for lighting and water-softener regeneration
- Refill water-softener brine reservoir
- Restock vendors

### Maintenance to be Performed Monthly

- Lubricate locks with graphite
- Adjust light timer settings
- Replace pre-filter(s) for reverse-osmosis system
- Lubricate pump seals if applicable
- Inspect pump drive belts for wear and adjust tension

### Maintenance to be Performed at 500 Hours of Operation

- Change high-pressure-pump and air-compressor oil
- Replace vacuum dust filter bags
- Replace activated carbon media for reverse-osmosis system

### Maintenance to be Performed Annually

- Clean walls and parking lot with pressure washer
- Paint exposed building metal

## REQUIRED MAINTENANCE

### Maintenance to be Performed as Needed

- Inspect hoses, trigger guns, nozzles, and brushes for wear
- Repair all leaks
- Replace pump seals and/or valves at the first indication of pulsation, leaks, or wear
- Clean or replace reverse-osmosis membrane when reduction of permeate is evident
- Remove graffiti, dated signs, or deteriorated banners
- Replace worn or frayed bay and/or vacuum components
- Replace faded or torn/cut decals
- Clean-out sediment traps before clogging occurs

## OTHER FACTORS

Consider age, activity, and quality of the equipment when performing maintenance. Older and busier equipment requires more maintenance, but typically increases net income. By operating equipment longer you reduce capital investments, which should increase net income. Replace antiquated equipment when maintenance cost or reliability becomes unacceptable. Higher-quality equipment lasts longer and, by performing maintenance, profits will be maximized.

The goal of any business is to purchase equipment with the highest value. Seek the guidance of other owner/operators and market professionals — reliable sources that have experience — to make informed decisions. Select durable equipment, considering quality of components, ease and need of maintenance, simplicity of design, and price. Systems that are easily understood and have accessible components make maintenance faster, therefore have a higher value. Value is the perception of worth, making the equipment more desirable. This formula illustrates how purchasing quality equipment with a low operating cost will affect the perceived value of the system: **Quality X Cost = Value.**



**Left:** Test each bay meter by inserting coin, token, credit card, and/or bill as applicable.

High-quality systems have better components and simpler designs. Simple designs have:

- Fewer components
- Fewer failures
- Require less maintenance

Less service time is required for more-reliable equipment. A dependable system will produce more income and “in-service” time. Also, by using quality components on simpler equipment, the same real costs are maintained. The best components and systems need little or no maintenance, allowing for more free time. More free time will lead to more fun. Ultimately, reliable equipment is more fun and the highest value is achieved. 📷

Gary Wirges is president of North Little Rock, AR-based CustomKraft Ind., Inc. You can contact Gary via e-mail at [info@customkraft.com](mailto:info@customkraft.com).