

Keep your vehicle team in top shape

Your utility vehicles take on a lot of responsibility. Whether you have one UV that does it all, or you have a fleet taking care of your towing, hauling, and transport needs, chances are you depend on UVs more than you realize. With that in mind, think about where their upkeep falls on your list of priorities. Is it an afterthought? A once-a-season effort? A regular, proactive maintenance program for your utility vehicle can not only keep your operation running more smoothly, but also save money in the long run—in both maintenance costs and lost work time.

Regularly maintaining your utility vehicle begins with the one component most often ignored—the operator's manual. Each manufacturer and model of vehicle needs specialized care that is detailed in the manual, ranging from the recommended fuel type to the air filter replacement schedule. Most importantly, the manuals contain safety information that is essential to keeping your team of operators safe and productive.

After becoming familiar with the operator's manual, set up a regular maintenance log to record your efforts for each specific vehicle. By doing so, you can keep track of the maintenance schedules as well as log any problems that may occur during the season.

While performing maintenance, pay attention to several key areas. First on that list should be the engine. It needs to be clean and free of debris to operate at maximum efficiency. Also, it is the one part of the vehicle that all other systems depend on.

The next few items—oil, coolant, and the air filter—should be placed on a schedule and monitored according to the operator's recommendations. Be sure not to overfill or underfill, which can reduce power and cause fuel pump and breather problems. Look for warning signs like contami-

nants or a burnt smell that could indicate overheating.

If your UV has a liquid-cooled engine, check the manual to be sure that you are using the correct antifreeze and flushing the radiator at proper intervals. If you have an air-cooled engine, check the prescreen and cooling fins to make sure they are free of debris and dirt.

Try to check the air filter only as often as your operator's manual recommends. When it is time to open the system, wipe down the area around the intake hose and filter canister to prevent contaminants from entering the system. If the filter appears dirty, replace the filter rather than cleaning it.

Check Daily

There are a few things that can be done every day. Checking for leaks below the parked equipment and inspecting the electrical system are things that should become a habit each day before the machine is turned on. Make sure the wiring is neither worn nor frayed. Check the spark plugs to make sure that the electrodes have brown or gray/tan deposits on them. Darker deposits indicate that the engine is using more oil than necessary, and lighter deposits show an air fuel mixture that is too lean.

It seems obvious to check the fuel, but keep in mind that new, clean fuel keeps the vehicle running smoothly. Fuel breaks down in about 30 days, so be sure to drain any fuel that is left sitting over time. In addition, check the lubricants in the drive train because they act as cleaners within the machine.

Every so often, check the belts in the vehicles for wear and fraying. If they are not in excellent condition, change them and inspect further for rubbing or pulleys that are out of



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ment.

Some utility vehicles on the market run on batteries. Caring for this energy system is essential to extending its life. Be sure to charge batteries after each use, but do not charge the batteries if the utility vehicle has not been used that day. Also, be sure the batteries are fully charged before using the vehicle each day. The typical charge time is 10 to 12 hours, but as much as four additional hours of charging may be required when they are more than 80 percent discharged.

Finally, have your dealer service your utility vehicle once a year for a good bill of health. It's the last step in the process that keeps your most versatile piece of equipment in top shape for the season.

This article was contributed by Bob Laveau, marketing manager, John Deere Vehicle Group.