

# Preventative versus reactive maintenance

PLASTICS  
MACHINING  
AND EQUIPMENT

by Molly Long and Whitney Wiggin

**D**o you have an enforced preventative maintenance (PM) plan in place? Have you fallen for the common misconception that routinely scheduled maintenance is more costly than running your machine until it fails? Given today's current economic climate, preventative maintenance has never been more important and is a valuable investment in your existing assets. Every company and their respective machinery can benefit from a proper PM plan; if you do not have a strong plan in place you should implement one immediately. Plastic fabricators and distributors should be particularly vigilant about their PM practices, given the harsh nature of their materials and work environments.

## What is PM?

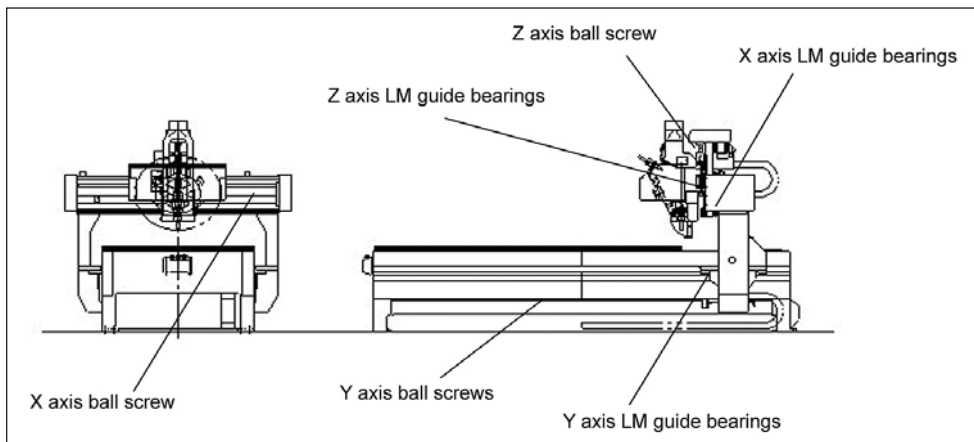
PM is a set of tasks routinely scheduled for the ongoing care and upkeep of a machine. PM may include daily, weekly, monthly and/or annual tasks. These tasks include, but are not limited to, cleaning, lubrication, visual and audible inspection, checking alignment, measuring tolerance, squareness, etc. This ultimately reduces costly downtime due to equipment failure or malfunction and increases profitable uptime. Every machine has its unique inspection points and one should always ask: "What have we overlooked or neg-

lected with regard to maintenance on this machine?" For example, when it comes to routine care of your vehicle — oil changes, tire pressure, timing belts, etc. — you don't think twice. Your machinery, the lifeblood of your business, deserves the same level of attention and priority maintenance.

## Value of and reasons for PM

Proper PM extends the life of a machine and avoids considerable machine downtime. A well maintained machine will always have a longer, more useful life and will perform better. Regular PM reduces equipment failure and the chances of wrong or unnecessary machine repairs being made. The following is a short list of some additional key benefits of preventative maintenance:

- Increases machine and operator safety, which may also reduce insurance rates.
- Reduces the amount of money spent on spare or replacement part inventories.
- Optimizes machine performance — thereby producing a higher quality product resulting in more satisfied customers.
- Minimizes, and in most cases eliminates, costly machine downtime.
- Requires machine operators to have a better understanding of their equipment and to maintain a standard level of care.



Lubrication points for a Hendrick 20ZXGN 3 Axis CNC Router.



Semi-annual router spindle lubrication on Hendrick 20ZXGN CNC Router.

## PM plans and how to successfully implement them

A PM plan is not solely for older machines. It should be put into action immediately upon installation of any machine. Machinery technology has become more sophisticated, which means your machinery requires more involved care.

It is never too late to start a proper routine PM plan. If there is not one in place, contact your machine manufacturer for detailed maintenance schedules to get started or improve upon your existing plan. Companies should work directly with their machine manufacturers/service providers to set in place regularly scheduled PM visits. Daily, weekly and/or monthly PM can usually be carried out by a company's own personnel. Note: annual maintenance is best completed by your machine manufacturer's factory trained technicians. Reputable machine manufacturers will have various levels of maintenance plans available to you for consideration. Work closely with your machine manufacturer to craft a maintenance plan that will work best for your company. This will maximize the potential of your PM plan.

While working closely with your machine manufacturer, you should also have a dedicated and focused internal maintenance point person or crew, as mentioned above. It is essential that these individuals are properly trained on the machine's op-

eration, maintenance and safety. Often-times, companies can lose sight of their maintenance programs due to operator turnover. Not only is the maintenance schedule interrupted or abandoned in this instance, but new operators are rarely properly trained, jeopardizing safety and efficiency. When new operators are provided with proper training on programming, operating and maintenance techniques, the potential for costly errors is greatly reduced.

A standard must be set high to achieve a successful maintenance program. Those overseeing production must realize the critical role PM plays in reaching production goals and allow for adequate time to carry out necessary maintenance tasks. Operators and maintenance crews must commit to follow through on all PM tasks, large or small, on a continual basis. Also, follow up training related to maintenance practices and machine operation contributes to the success of effective PM.

**In conclusion**

If you have a machine, it is inevitable that you will experience machine downtime one way or another. You can choose to be proactive and prevent unscheduled



Monthly inspection of material support rollers for Hendrick VSs Vertical Panel Saw.

downtime with proper ongoing PM or risk a more costly halt in production due to machine failure. Your company's maintenance program should never be reactive.

With a strong PM plan in place and properly trained operators your company will not only extend the life of your machinery but also improve safety and reduce operating costs.

In short, take care of your machinery and it will take care of you. ■

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