

ISSUE 15

WATSON DIESEL INC

JUSTIFYING A NEW TRUCK WASH BAY

In previous issues of our newsletter, we spend a lot of time talking about truck maintenance, truck specs, equipment issues, etc. In this issue we're going in a bit of a different direction which does ultimately come back to truck maintenance. In this issue we will talk about spec'ing out a new garage. Over the past few years we have seen a surge in municipalities building new buildings. For most, these facilities are long overdue. Having a warm and clean office space for conducting business can be just as important as having a warm and clean new truck to plow with. But something that we have come across in our travels to the many municipalities across the state is the lack of a dedicated wash facility.

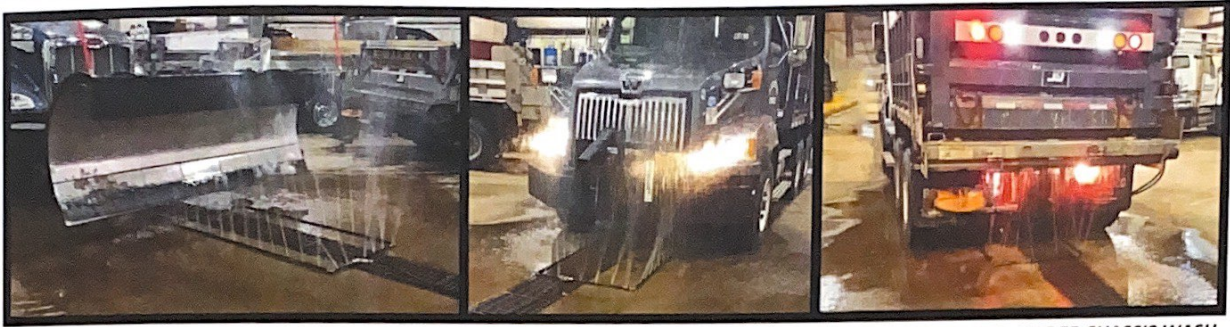
We mentioned in a previous issue the importance of cleaning a truck before servicing it. But washing the vehicle after every snow event should be a priority in your vehicle maintenance program, right up there with greasing and checking fluid levels. If you think about it why do you grease the steering, drivetrain and pivot points on a regular schedule? The answer is you are simply extending the life of these components and thus extending the life of your vehicle. So, to an equal degree, a systematic washing of the truck is the cheapest way to extend the life of your investment. Your municipal environment is arguably the most corrosive application that one can imagine. This problem has been ramped up by the increased use of salt and brine for pre-treatment applications. At our Canton Municipal facility, we started tracking failures in the industry over the past year and found that corrosion related problems make up over 80% of all failures. Even with a properly up-fitted truck using the best construction practices we still have a large amount of switch and relay problems. Adding to the problem, new trucks are twice as "electrically intense" as 25 years ago. You also have to remember that even though you may purchase a premium stainless steel constructed dump body, many of the subcomponents to this body are carbon steel. Even with these carbon steel components painted or coated, just a few nicks in the finish and the corrosion process starts.

The only way to stave off this problem is to thoroughly wash the vehicle after every use. We have been throwing around the term "systematic" a lot but this is key to the process. If you don't have a plan before you wash, you are liable to miss some key areas that corrosion can attack.

We have seen trucks come into our shop that were only 2 years old that probably have only 2 more years of service in them due to accelerated corrosion and rust. On the flip side, we have a few townships that have units that are going on 10 years old and have another 10 years left in them. What is the difference? The townships with the 10-year-old trucks have a wash program in place.

Practice makes perfect:

We find it best to start your wash program before your truck is dirty with anti-skid and salt so that you can look at the unit and identify the potential problem spots. These spots are the hard to get to spots up in under the chassis, around cross members, inside the frame rails, box cross members, etc. Under the hood you will find a grab bag of problem spots. Not only are the majority of electrical components located in this area, the engine is intense with steel fuel injection lines, air lines and more.



LOYALSOCK TOWNSHIP IN HOUSE FABRICATED UNDER CHASSIS WASH

Washing the underside of the unit is tough. Laying on a creeper with a pressure washer is not pleasant, with water and debris dripping in your face. We have a customer that showed us an "Under Body" wash device that they fabricated themselves made of black iron pipe with a series of small holes drilled in it, hooked to a pressure washer that they simply lay on the floor turn it on and drive the truck back and forth over it. This is a great way to get into spots that would otherwise be impossible to reach without great effort.

After this, raise the dump body and properly secure with the body prop and start cleaning the box underside, paying attention to body cross members, truck frame cross members and frame rails, suspension components, brake and wheel areas and electrical components. Then raise the hood and repeat the same process starting at the firewall and working your way down the engine, steering and brake components, and inside the hood area around the back side of the headlights.

If you are going to be finished spreading anti-ski for a few days make sure that the table chain and chain trough is washed out also. We see a lot of stainless steel or poly spreaders that the body is like new but the chain and chain components are rusted beyond use.

Justifying that new building

So, this is where the new building comes into play. You don't have to go out and build a new building to start a wash program. You can retrofit an existing building to do the job, by having all your wash equipment in place and ready to go. If you have to pull out the washer, look for the soap etc, you will have less chance at doing frequent washings. But if you are lucky enough to be able to spec out a new building, you can incorporate a dedicated wash bay that has everything you need hooked up and waiting. This will make the process easier and thus



workers will have a tendency to do a more thorough job of cleaning. If you think about it, extending the life of a \$100,000 by double, it is easy to justify the cash outlay in a building and cleaning equipment to the taxpayers of the municipality. It would be easy to see a 3-5 year payback on your investment in extending the life of the truck, not to mention the reduction of nickel and dime repairs on wiring, etc.

Investing in quality floor mats is another important aspect of extending the life of your truck. A quality floor mat that holds the water and debris tracked into the truck, such as the Weather Tech series of mats, are ideal. Resist the temptation to "hose out" the floor of the truck, as the water spray can mix with the salt tracked in and carry it onto critical electrical components located inside the cab.

So as we said, this is a little bit different angle on preventative maintenance, but in the end this program will pay dividends for a long time. So with winter half over it is still not too late to start your truck wash program, and you will be confident in pitching to your tax paying residents that your new shop is not just a nice warm place to get out of the weather, but rather a way to stretch their tax dollar.