



FLEET PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE

Why (and how) to prioritize it



Most companies operating fleets understand the value of preventive maintenance, but that doesn't mean that they're as vigilant as they want to be. Daily urgencies often crowd out the upkeep that would make all the difference, and it isn't until a problem becomes a crisis that it gets the attention it needs.

Unfortunately, this reactive maintenance ends up being costly for the company. Not only are there the financial costs of repairs or replacements, but it also means unplanned downtime, unscheduled time-off for team members who use that equipment, and missed deadlines.

According to a [KPMG](#) study, a single breakdown could cost as much as \$3,000. Preventable surprises like this are simply too costly to ignore, even if you have a relatively small number of vehicles in your fleet.

In this eBook, we'll examine the importance of fleet preventive maintenance, the costs of not having a strategy in place, and how to create a plan to protect your fleet and equipment.

The importance of fleet preventive maintenance

Preventive maintenance is critical for the success and safety of your fleet. It ensures that your equipment stays in peak condition, operating safely for as long as possible. Vehicles like trucks obviously fall under the scope of preventive maintenance, but it's also important for backup generators, trailers, or any other equipment your organization depends on.

Often, preventive maintenance is performed on equipment that's running perfectly. You're not reacting to problems, you're stopping them from occurring by planning around the expected lifespan of individual components. The goal is to keep everything operating at peak efficiency, which means replacing parts that wear easily, making minor adjustments, and keeping everything clean, oiled, and working efficiently.

The challenge is that it requires you to spend time and money on equipment that isn't having problems yet. You might believe in the value of preventive maintenance, but it gets easy to defer maintenance that isn't immediately crucial.

But fleet preventive maintenance isn't just a good idea—it's a legal requirement.

Fleet preventive maintenance is a DOT requirement

Fleet managers are responsible for keeping your fleet vehicles in good working order and ensuring they're safe to operate. According to the [Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration \(FMCSA\)](#), fleet owners and carriers are required to systematically inspect, repair, and maintain all motor vehicles and intermodal equipment subject to its control. Carriers are also required to accurately document their maintenance efforts and to ensure that the records are made available within two days if requested.

Failure to keep up with this record can not only lead to substantial fines, it may leave you legally liable for expenses incurred in an accident, even if you cannot find clear evidence that mechanical failure caused the accident. You must track when you perform any kind of maintenance or evaluation of your fleet vehicles and clearly document your efforts. Fleet maintenance software like [Whip Around](#) can make it easier to keep up with individual reports for each vehicle

The cost-reducing effect of fleet preventive maintenance

Over time, machinery wears down and sometimes even stops working completely. Some vehicles may be able to continue to operate a few thousand miles over the recommended oil change date, but can you really afford the long-term consequences?

Taking the time to commit to a preventive maintenance schedule as early as possible is the most effective way to ensure that your equipment keeps running smoothly, and less time is spent on unplanned repairs.

And as we mentioned earlier, preventive maintenance is important not only for vehicles but for all of the equipment your business depends on, including:

- Trailers
- Backup generators
- Heavy manufacturing equipment
- Computers, printers, scanners, or other critical office equipment
- Any tool used to accomplish daily construction tasks

Your bottom line depends upon getting the most life out of every piece of machinery or equipment you have invested in for your business.

There's no way around it. Without a preventive maintenance program in place, you'll end up paying more to keep your business running. Here are some of the most common costs you can reduce with an effective fleet preventive maintenance program.





Unplanned driver downtime

According to [Work Truck](#), for every day that you have a vehicle down, it could cost between \$448 and \$760. When your vehicles aren't running, your people can't work. However, in many cases, you may still have to pay your employees. Unplanned downtime can reveal how poorly prepared you are to reprioritize your workload on the fly.

But when you schedule preventive maintenance, you can work around your drivers and overall business needs, planning time off or work for them to do during the vehicle's downtime. Not only that, preventive maintenance usually keeps your vehicles out of commission for a shorter period of time than unplanned vehicle emergencies, since you don't have to diagnose, wait for parts to come in, or potentially transport a stranded vehicle.

Increased repair costs

Regularly scheduled maintenance can help prevent the need for much more costly repairs. Simply taking care of those tasks ahead of time can substantially reduce your overall costs. When the failure to take care of maintenance leads to significant damage to equipment, it can often prove expensive—and sometimes, those broken components lead to even greater failures and vehicle damage.

Shortened equipment life

If you're not staying on top of scheduled maintenance, you may end up replacing the equipment more often, which causes significantly higher costs to keep your business running. In fact,

you'll also notice that parts like tires wear out faster when vehicles aren't properly maintained, which raises operational costs long term.

Decreased fuel efficiency

All kinds of things go into your fuel efficiency: tire pressure, clean oil, unclogged intake systems, properly operating air conditioners, efficiently working engine cooling fan, etc. When your fleet travels thousands of miles each week, even a 1% decrease in fuel efficiency can lead to a substantial increase in fuel costs.

Increased risk of accidents

Failed components, including engines, transmissions, and tires, can lead to accidents on the road. An accident caused by lack of maintenance may leave your company responsible for a number of expenses:

- Cost of replacing or repairing the vehicle
- Medical expenses for your driver
- Legal expenses for any other injured individuals, including their medical expenses, repairs to their vehicle, and their legal fees. In the case of significant injury, you may also be liable for paying for pain and suffering, lost wages, and other expenses associated with the accident.

Invalidated vehicle warranties

Warranties protect your investments. If anything happens, it helps to have some insurance that your assets will be covered. Unfortunately, an inability to demonstrate proper care and maintenance of a piece of equipment can void the warranty and put you in a position to cover the expense yourself.

Inflated driver turnover

No fleet wants to deal with high driver turnover, especially when every business is struggling with a driver shortage. One of the best ways to keep drivers happy is to give them tools they can trust. They shouldn't be worried about putting themselves or others at risk or ending up broken down on the side of the interstate. Preventive maintenance helps ensure that equipment is in the best repair, and ensures trust in the organization.

It's clear that preventive maintenance can reduce costs and positively impact your business. But creating a [culture that prioritizes preventive maintenance](#) can be a real challenge, especially if it hasn't historically been an organizational strength.

How to create a fleet preventative maintenance plan

Maybe you find yourself up against a continuous stream of reactive maintenance requirements that overwhelm your mechanics. Maybe creating and tracking maintenance schedules is a disorganized mess. Or perhaps you just don't know where to start.

Whatever the case, implementing an effective preventive maintenance strategy isn't always easy. It's an effort that takes buy-in and participation from multiple people across your organization—and that means you need a plan. At a high-level, your preventive maintenance plan needs to address:

- The specific assets it applies to
- Who is responsible for the maintenance
- What maintenance needs to be done for each asset
- When that maintenance needs to take place

The easier it is to keep track of these components, the easier preventive maintenance will be. (Which is why so many fleets benefit from [fleet maintenance software like Whip Around](#).)

The specifics of your preventive maintenance program will depend on the assets you're maintaining as well as your company's employees, expertise, and tools. Regardless, the following seven points can help you create a plan that's set up for success.



1. Know your assets

A working knowledge of manufacturer recommendations for your assets is also critical. What services do they recommend on what timetable? Are there known issues you need to watch for on certain makes and models of vehicles? What parts do you need to have on hand? What does the warranty require?

While the needs of your individual fleet vehicles may vary, your preventive maintenance program should include both mechanical maintenance activities and maintenance of safety items. At a minimum, however, you should be addressing the following during a routine preventive maintenance service:

- Tune-ups
- Engine Oil and Filter Changes
- Transmission Fluid
- Fuel System
- Cooling System
- Exhaust System
- Electrical System Components
- Belts and Hoses
- Engine and Transmission Mounts
- Drive Shafts or CV Joints
- Braking System
- Steering and Suspension System
- Tires, Wheels, and Rims
- Undercarriage and Frame
- Exterior and Interior Lights
- Body, Glass, and Mirrors
- Windshield Wiper System
- Horn
- Seat Belts and Seat Structures
- Fluid Leaks
- Auxiliary Systems

2. Identify who is responsible for preventive maintenance

Knowing where the buck stops is critical. This means you need to know who is responsible for overseeing various equipment and ensuring that regular maintenance is being carried out. Then communicate and document your expectations with each individual.

It's important to understand and address how your preventive maintenance plan will impact your employee's workloads. Do your mechanics have time to perform preventive maintenance right now? If not, how can you address capacity issues as you balance reactive and preventive maintenance while getting your program in place?

3. Create a checklist for drivers

Federal regulations mandate that drivers complete inspections on their vehicles every day. It's critical to the fleet that these inspections are completed rigorously. Your drivers are on the front lines and they'll be the first to recognize any issues that need to be addressed.

Also, it's smart to think beyond the baseline federal inspection requirements. How can inspection forms be customized to help you catch issues before they become problems?

With Whip Around's fleet inspection and maintenance software, [DOT-compliant forms](#) are filled out digitally. Drivers fill out the customizable forms on their mobile device and can upload pics of any trouble areas. The moment those reports are completed, they show up in your dashboard.

You don't have to wait a couple of days for them to drop off a handful of paper reports. So if there is an issue, you can make a plan to take care of it immediately.

4. Plan for maintenance reminders

You will need a process for carrying out preventive maintenance. Without this critical element in place, it won't happen. For each asset, you need a strategy for ensuring that you know when maintenance is due and can plan for it to be completed on time.

With Whip Around, you can have automatic maintenance reminders sent out whenever it's time to schedule maintenance on a piece of equipment. In fact, you can decide on the maintenance criteria. You can schedule services to occur after a certain number of miles, a set number of hours, or a specific amount of time since the previous service. You can even use "due soon" maintenance reminders so you can plan for equipment to be offline or out of use.

5. Communicate in a timely manner

Everyone needs to know what they're responsible for and how the maintenance process works. They need to understand your expectations and how to exceed them. If there are best practices that will prevent wear and tear on equipment, they need to have it clearly communicated.

6. Have a plan for storing vehicle records

Your fleet preventive maintenance strategy is only as effective as your record keeping. You need to know when equipment was serviced, who performed the maintenance, and what was done. Not only is this required for DOT and financial audits, but it also helps you identify trends, protect the warranty, and maintain the highest resale value.

Not excited by the prospect of scrolling through spreadsheets, log books, or file cabinets trying to discern when the last time an asset had routine maintenance, or when it needs to be conducted again? Whip Around keeps all of that information in one convenient dashboard, available at your fingertips the moment you need it.

7. Assess your progress

You can't just set up a fleet preventive maintenance plan and forget it. You will need to analyze it periodically to ensure that everything is operating smoothly. Keep track of things like vehicle downtime, fluctuating repair costs, and what kinds of unplanned and avoidable repairs are occurring regularly.

For a deeper look at this process, check out our free [7-Step Guide to preventive Maintenance](#)

The key to successful maintenance programs

Not only is maintenance legally mandated, it can offer a number of advantages to your fleet as a whole, including helping to protect your finances and your business.

And preventive maintenance software is key to making it happen. For fleets of all sizes, but especially mid- and large-sized fleets, it turns maintenance from an organizational nightmare into a straightforward process. With Whip Around, you can:

- Quickly and easily view equipment maintenance history
- Schedule automatic maintenance reminders
- Manage work orders and sign-offs
- Customize digital inspection forms
- And much more

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