

How-to

Preventative Maintenance Tips for Forges That Cut and Process Metal

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While some downtime is inevitable, more and more forges and other industrial metal-cutting companies are discovering that proper maintenance and proactive care of equipment can significantly reduce its occurrence.

The problem is that maintenance departments are typically busy putting out fires, which pushes anything “preventative” to the side. Why take the time to stop a potential problem when there are enough real problems happening right now?

However, as stated in the eBook, *Five Performance-Boosting Best Practices for your Industrial Metal-Cutting Organization*, proactively addressing maintenance issues allows managers to reduce costs, increase blade and tooling life, and, most importantly, avoid costly mistakes. “With a simple check-list, operators can enhance their knowledge base and positively affect performance on the shop floor,” the eBook states.

What does this look like in practice? According to the white paper, *Accounting for Operator Inefficiencies in the Metals 2.0 Environment*, operators can conduct daily preventative maintenance (PM) checks in less than 10 minutes.

Programs can be as detailed as a manager feels is necessary, but in a band saw environment, the following are a few key checkpoints to include:

- Checking coolant levels
- Cleaning saw blades of debris
- Visual tests of critical tooling elements such as the feed system and lasers
- Double-checking parameter settings (i.e., speed and feed rate)

Although many shops conduct PM checks at the start of each shift, there are several ways managers can schedule their PM procedures. In a *recent blog*, maintenance software provider SM Global offers four possible PM schedules:

1. **Date based:** Schedule PM checks every X amount of days, weeks or months. So, for example, you can have a maintenance task scheduled every 5 business days, on every Friday, the second Monday of every third month, every January on the first Wednesday and so on.
2. **Meter based:** There are two different meter types. In one, you schedule maintenance every time a meter reading increases or decreases by a certain amount. For example, an oil change when a meter reading increases by 3000 miles. The second type is a batch meter. You schedule maintenance after an equipment processes X number of units. For example, replace a bearing every time the equipment produces 500 widgets.
3. **Alarm based:** You schedule a maintenance task every time an alarm condition happens. For example, an alarm could be excessive vibration on a machine. You can schedule a PM check on the machine when this alarm occurs.
4. **Relative to another task:** Start a new maintenance task when another task completes. For example, order more coolant every time you clean your fluid/lubricant reservoir and screen (typically every 3 months).

If your metal forging operation doesn't have a current PM program in place, you may want to consider working closely with your equipment and tooling supply partners to set up daily, monthly, quarterly, and annual PM schedules. In addition to helping you create checklists, many provide complimentary annual or bi-annual PM check-ups, which can provide more in-depth equipment diagnostics.

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