

Production Management Considerations

The objective of production management is to make a vehicle move through a shop without hesitation. It requires a thorough review of the repair plan to determine what should be done and when to eliminate choke points in the shop to keep the vehicle moving. Any time a vehicle stops during the process, you create idle time for technicians, reduce touch time and increase cycle time.

Recently I visited a shop on a Wednesday afternoon and noticed most of the paint shop technicians sitting around, not having much to do. As I continued my walk through the shop, I came across a repair sitting in a body repair stall that had a neatly stacked parts cart behind it. On that parts cart was a new hood and front bumper. Upon inspection of the vehicle, it appeared that those were the only parts that needed to be painted, which led me to a conversation with the technician. I learned from our discussion that the repair process had been pretty much complete, but the technician was waiting on an AC condenser and intercooler. While we were talking we were approached by the shop manager, and the technician left to go work on a different repair.

As we walked through the shop, the manager and I continued discussing the repair. He told me they generally don't send vehicles to paint until the end of the process. I asked if the rule applied to vehicles that had all of the body repairs completed and were stopped in the repair process waiting on parts. He told me he really didn't think about it and usually repairs kept moving, adding that this particular repair was out of the norm. The visible parts were ordered prior to the vehicle arriving and once they had it torn down, they found the AC condenser and intercooler were damaged.

I discussed with him that this was a good example of why you should be flexible in your production management process and take into consideration when the vehicle could actually be painted. This step is crucial especially when the paint team is low on work. Sending the vehicle to paint out of sequence in this instance would not create a choke point and would keep the repair moving – two pieces in the objective of production management.

Reviewing repairs in the production process on a routine basis will help you catch instances where a vehicle is stopped in the repair process because it is waiting on other repairs to be accomplished. There was no logical reason for this vehicle to be sitting. Being able to install an AC condenser and intercooler does not depend on the vehicle being painted first, and vice versa. It would, however, move the vehicle through the repair process faster and eliminate the idle time I observed in the paint shop.

Revising a production plan mid-stream is a good way to catch those repairs that are “out of the norm” to maintain a steadily flowing production process. I recommend you monitor your “Work In Process” (WIP) three times a day. The first review would be around 10 a.m. where you would speak with those involved in the repair process that you feel could answer any questions that may come up. Generally this is the shop manager, repair planner/production manager, technicians, painters and parts personnel. At this time you would also review each repair to verify its status, determine set times when the vehicle would move to the next repair phase and identify any reasons why a vehicle is not on target.

The second review would come around 2 p.m. and usually involve the repair planner/production manager and technician assigned to the repair phase the vehicle is currently in. At this point the repair planner/production manager would validate the promises made at the 10 a.m. meeting and ensure that the repair is on track. This is a great time to find things that are “out of the norm” to determine if repair phase changes should be made mid-stream.

Around 4 p.m. the final meeting of the day would occur where the manager would review the WIP with the repair planner/production manager to determine how the day went, discuss any problem vehicles and set the stage for the next day’s 10 a.m. meeting. This meeting should be just long enough to validate the repairs being accomplished and resolve any issues that would interrupt the production process.

Two things we all know are that idle technicians are not generally happy, and customer satisfaction is driven by how soon you return their vehicle to them. Monitoring repairs throughout the production process eliminates the surprises you will need to explain to customers while improving technician efficiency. This quote from Glen B. Alleman says it best: “A plan is the strategy for the successful completion of a project; any project without a plan is a project wandering in the wilderness.” Don’t be that shop that lets anything wander in the wilderness. Start working on a plan today to keep vehicles – and technicians – moving through each repair process efficiently and profitably.