

EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE

By David Lantrip, MCPPE, GCF

PUTTING TIME INTO MAINTAINING YOUR EQUIPMENT WILL SAVE YOU TIME, MONEY, AND HASSLE IN THE LONG RUN.

Think about how important your equipment and tools are to the success of your business. Without an operating saw or chopper, you cannot cut a frame. If your underpinner is not working you cannot join a frame. Even if your equipment is working, if it not in best working order, your product will be subpar and you will waste hours of your time making up for it. Just think of how long it takes to putty four corners of every frame because your saw is off or how much material you can waste recutting mats because something is off. A small investment in maintaining your equipment means it will continue to make you money without headaches.

Before even considering maintenance, make sure you have read the manual. It contains basic operating instructions that will help you get the most out of it, as well as information on basic care. Even if you are familiar with the tool there will be some small points that you may have missed. Second, familiarize yourself and your employees with all of the safety instructions and warnings. Finally, never remove or disable safety features. Whatever time or convenience you may gain is not worth the risk of serious injury.

Maintenance needs can be broken down into three broad categories: ongoing maintenance, occasional maintenance and consumable replacements. Ongoing maintenance is comprised of the tasks you perform daily or on an ongoing basis. Think of things like cleaning glue squeeze-out from the underpinner or putting fresh blades in the matcutter. Tasks such as squaring a wall-mounted materials cutter or switching out saw blades fall under occasional maintenance. Consumable replacements include parts that commonly wear out and are expected to be changed on a more or less regular basis. Air bladder clamps on some computerized matcutters or underpin-



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ner drive heads are two examples. It is a good idea to have items such as these on hand to avoid costly and annoying downtime.

Framing equipment and the specifics of maintenance will vary by manufacturer and from model to model, but there are common needs. Following is a general guide of what may need attention and what tasks should be carried out on a regular basis. As always, refer to the owner's manual for specifics.

FRAME CUTTING EQUIPMENT

Regardless of the equipment, sharp blades are essential. Keep at least two sets of blades on hand so that a freshly sharpened set is always ready to go. Empty the offcut bin regularly and occasionally vacuum out sawdust, paying special attention to any electrical safety cutoff switches. Sawdust can interfere with the operation of equipment, including this safety cutoff on a double miter saw. Be sure to blow or vacuum off any dust around moving or electrical parts. Lubricate any moving parts according to the manual and keep on hand a pair of new drive belts and spare fuses.

Choppers have few moving parts and are therefore fairly low-maintenance other than replacing blades and lubrication. The springs can eventually break, so having a new pair on hand is a good idea.



● To avoid jams and rough operation, it is important to keep the surfaces of an underpinner clean and free of glue. Spray it once a week with WD40 and wipe it off to leave behind a film that will keep things moving smoothly and make it easy to remove glue.

UNDERPINNER

Most underpinner care boils down to cleaning and lubrication. When joining frames, constantly clean excess glue, especially in the area around the driver block where the V-nails exit. Wiping down the joining surface weekly with WD40 will both prevent rust and make glue easy to remove. Regularly lubricate the wedge block assembly with the recommended lubricant according to the manual.

The wedge driver, or hammer, which pushes the V-nails out and into the frame can wear and develop burrs which can cause poor operation and jamming. This should be considered a regular replacement item and a spare kept on hand.

DRY MOUNT PRESS

Press maintenance is mainly a matter of keeping it clean. Check for adhesive buildup on the platen regularly and clean as needed. Replace the release paper and board as soon as they show signs of wear.

The pressure gauge on a vacuum press should generally read about 24 within thirty seconds; if it takes significantly longer or the pressure is low it is time to diagnose the problem. Most likely the seal between the bladder and the lid is faulty, a problem which can often be cured by adjusting the lid hinges.

The pressure of a mechanical press is adjusted with the pressure adjustment nuts. With the materials in the press and the lid down but not locked, the lever arm should be at a 45 degree angle. If not, too much or too little pressure is applied and adjustment is needed. Also replace the sponge pad when it shows signs of wear or is dirty.

MAT CUTTER

Both manual and computerized mat cutters have common needs. Their slip sheets and blades must be replaced on a regular basis and any surfaces with moving parts must be kept clean. Regularly brush or blow out slivers and fibers of matboard that accumulate.

Other than cleaning and replacing slip sheets, computerized mat cutters require little care. Depending on the model, it may have a rubber bladder that clamps the mat in place or rollers on the cutting head. Both of these can wear and fail, so keep a replacement on hand. This is also true of nylon blade cartridges; as they wear the blade can move slightly and cause poor cutting.

The smooth operation of a clean mat cutter is a delight. Ensure ease of use with regular cleaning of all moving parts and cutting head bar, as well as checking for excess play in the cutting head. The cutting head of a manual mat cutter must move smoothly and easily. Clean it regularly with lighter fluid, which will also leave just enough lubrication to ensure smooth operation without worry that oil will ruin a mat. Also periodically check that all parts of the cutting head are tight without slack or play. Refer to the manual for instructions for checking that the mat guide is parallel to the cutter head shaft and how to make any needed adjustments.

MATERIAL CUTTER

Periodically check that the wall-mounted material cutter for glass, acrylic, and boards is square. Few things are more frustrating than trying to fit a large lite of out-of-square glass into a frame. The manual has instructions



● The smooth operation of a clean mat cutter is a delight. Ensure ease of use with regular cleaning of all moving parts and cutting head bar, as well as checking for excess play in the cutting head. Courtesy of Fletcher Business Group

for checking square and making needed adjustments.

Regularly brush off glass chips and paper fibers and wipe off the arms on which the cutting head rides, which generally should not be lubricated. Replace the glass cutter wheel and other blades as soon as the quality of cuts declines. If you find yourself applying more pressure to get a good score on the glass it is time to replace the wheel.

COMPRESSOR

Drain the compressor of water and air at the end of each day. Be sure to close the drain valve and turn it off, or it could inadvertently run all night. Regularly check the oil level and top off as needed.

COMPUTERS

Computers deserve their own discussion. They run your computerized matcutter, your point of sale system and are an indispensable tool for any business. Be sure to regularly update programs including the operating system and any malware/virus protection. Failure to do so may mean that some programs do not run well or you may not

get full use of their features and upgrades.

It is a simple fact of life that computers wear and slow down, and dealing with slow, buggy machines is just not worthwhile. With computers being so inexpensive now, it would be reasonable to plan to replace them every five years and avoid problems.

All of this is a general overview of the maintenance needs of most common framing equipment. Once again, refer to the manuals for details and specifics. Hopefully all of this is familiar territory. If so, let it be a reminder to take a second look at your equipment and ask if there are any bugs or workarounds you have gotten used to and encourage you to take care of things. If you take care of your tools, they will take care of you. **PFM**



David Lantrip

David is the director of education for Franchise Concepts, and the franchisor for Deck The Walls, The Great Frame Up, and Framing and Art Centre stores. He has served in a number of roles in the PPFA including as a member of the International Board of Directors and serves on the Chapter Relations Committee as well as the Guidelines Task Force. David recently earned a Masters in Mass Communications degree from the University of Florida.



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