But How About Maintenance Costs?

Before a Contractor Buys That New Piece of Equipment There Are A Few Vital Questions To Be Answered

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It's a new design. Maintenance and repair will be less than on the present units.”

Such statements — and I’m sure you’ve heard them before — happen often and you just as often too quickly dismiss these vital factors in the cost of equipment use.

Maintenance and repair costs are never so unimportant as to be disregarded on even low-cost units. Never take for granted that the replacement will be less expensive to use than present equipment.

Here are some guidelines to apply in equipment selection with respect to maintenance and repair costs. They represent standard practices of several firms that are well aware, usually through costly experience, of the value in using them.

1 — Compare the areas of required preventive maintenance with those on present equipment. Similar appearing ones can have a marked difference on how much maintenance and repair will be needed. Cost estimates based on existing records should be adjusted to fit such differences.

2 — Operating speed of the unit may be a major maintenance factor. As a more-or-less general rule, the higher the speed, the more maintenance attention will be required. Where the new equipment is fast enough to increase productivity, maintenance and repair costs are likely to be higher. Check records on present equipment for maintenance and repair that are directly attributable to operating speed; then project such probable costs applicable to the new unit.

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3 — Consider next the difference in number of moving parts involved in performing a given task. More moving parts may create added maintenance and repair costs; fewer may reduce both. Whenever moving parts exist, maintenance will be needed.

4 — Metals and alloys of which the new unit is made can affect future maintenance and repair costs. In most cases, improvements in materials during the past few years have lowered maintenance and repair costs. It’s never safe, though, to take this for granted. Make a study to determine whether such changes will definitely result in lower costs.

5 — More automated operation or self-operating features of the new unit may or may not affect maintenance and repair costs. If automated capabilities do away with high repair costs caused by operator mistakes, a decisive gain is made.

The cost of keeping a complex unit in operation, though, could be higher than for present equipment. Usually such an increase is more than offset by a gain in productivity.

6 — Wage factors with respect to equipment maintenance always require close study. A glance at maintenance salary cost records will highlight how much these have increased over the past 5 years. They may take a similar jump in the next five years.

Wages are also of particular importance with respect to the skill required in maintenance and repair work on new equipment as compared with the old. Higher skills will call for higher wages.

7 — Compare lubrication costs, especially for cars, trucks, etc., for the new unit with those of present equipment. Where lubrication is a steady maintenance requirement, this can be of dollar-and-cents importance.

8 — Examine each specific part in the new unit for possible maintenance cost. This procedure may be tedious but it will produce a true picture of future maintenance and repair costs.

9 — Don’t neglect to consider possible downtime for maintenance or repair work. If more downtime is needed, both production and profit may suffer.

10 — Check closely the prime points of conventional wear in equipment, such as bearings.

11 — Poor accessibility of all parts for preventive maintenance, adjustment and repair can raise maintenance and repair costs. This applies not only to payroll costs involved but also to the human weakness of avoiding anything that’s “too much trouble.”

12 — Make certain that any analysis of maintenance and repair costs is complete in all details. A decision made on the basis of only one or two factors may likely be wrong. Those ignored can be the ones that would alter the whole assessment. They usually are.