The oily truth: How to stop leaks

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By Frank Bourlon

Those annoying oil leaks can be found and repaired. It seems as if several of the newspapers I most recently visited have numerous oil leaks; in fact, in some pressrooms, oil containment socks are commonplace.

Granted, finding the source of an oil leak takes persistence. But since oil leaks follow gravity, it's logical to assume that if you follow the trail, you'll find the source.

Start by cleaning up all of the oil in the area of the leak and then identify its trail. You can use a dye-oil soluble paint if need be in order to track areas that are very dark or in a tight space.

Once you've identified the source, the repair can be made. Fortunately, the fix can be as easy as replacing a door or cover seal.

But in cases where the leak is evidence of a major breakdown, you may have to repair components that include the plate or blanket eccentric seal, a tougher task.

Another example is oil leaking around an SC Goss Community folder. This leak normally comes from not replacing the oil deflector shield. The shield is located inside the gear box on the right side next to where the top and bottom covers meet. This leak can be stopped by cleaning the area with acetone and then building a bridge of silicon across the seam. Oil will pass over the seam without passing through.

Through the air

Air leaks are very annoying and cause the air compressor to run excessively, which increases your electric bill and newsprint waste when the air cylinders fail to operate.

Air leaks can be difficult to find. Normally, I can feel the air from the leak passing across my hand. In other cases, soap bubbles can be used on the air lines or components to spot the leak. When these methods fail I use something called Professional Haze in a Can, aka fog in a can. The fog can be sprayed into very tight areas, helping you to find the leak. Sometimes, the air leak may not be where you think it is. For example, if the leak is found around or coming from the exhaust port of the air solenoid valve, the leak may in fact be coming from the air cylinder.

The air cylinder is comprised of a cylinder, a piston, a piston seal, a piston rod and two end caps.

Figure 1 shows air entering the right side of the cylinder, causing the piston rod to retract inside the cylinder (pulling mode).

Air is expelled from the left side of the cylinder as air fills the right side. The exhaust air from the cylinder travels through the air lines to the air solenoid valve and is expelled through the air solenoid valve exhaust port until the piston is at the end of its stroke.

The air will pass from one side of the cylinder to the other side and then exhaust through the air solenoid exhaust port if the piston seal is damaged — as shown in Figure 2.

The air cylinder piston seal will need to be replaced or the air cylinder itself will have to be replaced if the air cylinder is a non-repairable type.

Seal kits for air solenoids and air cylinders are very inexpensive and easy to use. Repair your air leaks and keep your sanity, and your money.

Water issues

Dampening system water leaks are another safety hazard — as well as a money drainer. The newsprint waste caused by these leaks is very expensive.

These leaks are normally due to clogged return lines, which cause overflows that can easily create a slip hazard on the floor.

When water trays are not cleaned on a regular basis, clogs develop. The system should be drained and then filled with fresh water, with bleach added to it, to kill the bacteria in the return lines. Don’t forget to clean and replace the water filter weekly — more often if poor quality newsprint is used.

Water trays should be checked and cleaned daily.

When all is said and done, your press will boast better register, generate less waste and be safer to work around if you can keep your leaks under control.

Find and fix the leaks. You’ll be happy you did.

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