

Store and Handle Grease with Care

By Gregory S. Neuenfeldt

I'm looking out my window at a snowy Michigan day as I write this article. As an avid rider of snowmobiles, embracing the cold and snow is a



must—so long as the opportunity to get warm presents itself every couple of hours. Like many of you, I look forward to the warm days of April and May when it's time to do some cleaning around the house and yard. Spring cleaning reminded me of some information I wanted to share about grease storage and handling.

One of the first and most important areas to discuss is cleanliness. You all have specific cleaning processes that you employ in order to get your parts ready for reassembly. If you are fortunate enough to have a separate building or area to do teardowns, then your assembly area is most likely cleaner than if it is in the vicinity of the teardown area.

One practice that is common in remanufacturing facilities is the storage of grease in small containers or tubs that typically get applied with a small brush. If we think about all of the contaminants that can (and will) settle on top of the grease, then I would suggest that lids get placed on the containers when not in use. As we all know, dust and dirt particles are contaminants that can be very abrasive when placed in a shaft to bushing interface or in a bearing. Also, it may help to have a lid with a small (one inch or so) hole in the center to use as access to the grease with the brush. The less surface area of the grease we expose, the less chance of grease contamination.

I also get questions about oil on top of grease and/or oil lying in the deep channels of the grease in the container. It is important to realize that grease is like a sponge and the oil will come out of grease if conditions are right. If the

oil is lying on top of the grease, then simply take a clean stir stick and work the oil back into the grease by stirring.

Sometimes oil will collect in the channels or pockets of a grease after someone has dipped a portion of the lubricant from the container. Again, stir the oil back into the grease. However, teach your workers that grease should be leveled or “smoothed out” in the container if it is not going to be used for several days. Oil tends not to bleed from a grease that is level in the container. If they want to level a small tub, then they can simply “smack” the container on a countertop and this will force the grease to level or settle flat. If you are seeing this in a pail or drum, then the grease should be leveled with a clean spatula or stir stick.

I did have one customer comment on oil coming out of their air-pressured grease dispensing system. This is due to the grease separating in the line under the constant pressure—which could be compared to “squeezing a sponge” and therefore forcing the oil out of the formulation. Workers should get in the habit of shutting off the air supply to the grease dispensing equipment when it will not be in use for several hours. Air pressure should definitely be shut down overnight, or there will be potential for separation by morning. Separation of oil from the grease can also be reduced by increasing the inner diameter of dispense piping, hoses, and nozzles where possible. Larger diameters equate to lower line pressures and lower line pressures equate to less bleeding of oil from the grease.

I hope you find these tips to be useful and that they help you to produce an even higher quality product for your customer. I look forward to sharing more information with you in 2006. I am also planning on meeting some of you at the technical clinic this month at Charlotte, N.C.

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