

# PERFORM REGULAR MAINTENANCE TO SUPPORT A SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENT

**Incorporating regular equipment maintenance into work routines may not only deliver ongoing performance benefits, but can also form a significant component of broader efforts to establish and maintain a safe working environment. It is therefore important to be familiar with the potential safety issues and outcomes associated with equipment maintenance, and to also be aware of the role that maintenance plays in the context of wider work health and safety programs.**

Thorough and ongoing equipment maintenance may potentially mitigate risks associated with certain activities across the scope of earthmoving operations, and it should also conversely be recognised that a lack of adequate maintenance could potentially contribute to hazardous situations.

As part of its *National Safe Work Month* initiative, Safe Work Australia (SWA), the Australian government statutory body responsible for developing national policy relating to work health and safety and workers' compensation, has outlined five steps to building a safe and healthy workplace: Design Safe, Source Safe, Use Safe, Keep Safe and Repeat (with information on each of the steps available via its website).

The Keep Safe step addresses the importance of maintenance, with SWA stating: "Damaged or poorly maintained equipment like broken ladders, split electrical cables and frayed ropes can cause serious injuries or death. Similarly, inefficient and outdated systems and equipment can become a hazard to both physical and mental health."

SWA recommends considering: if broken or damaged equipment has been replaced, if maintenance schedules are up to date, if workers can report breakdowns and malfunctions easily, if systems and equipment are contemporary, and if kit can be cleaned and stored appropriately.

Certainly, at a broader organisational level, clearly defined, supportive and adaptive systems, which encourage open communication, will assist maintenance practices. It is important to incorporate maintenance into work schedules as a matter of routine to keep accurate records of maintenance previously performed and to maintain a schedule of future maintenance that will need to be undertaken. In aid of



this, it may be worthwhile adopting new technologies, such as remote monitoring systems, which can provide further insight into equipment functions, potentially paving the way for more informed, efficient and effective maintenance practices. In developing maintenance schedules, it is worthwhile exploring all options, assessing what sort of value will be delivered, and having clear outcomes in mind.

Dependent upon equipment requirements and project demands, maintenance may range from minor daily checks, undertaken before, during and after operations, to more comprehensive weekly or monthly inspections, to scheduled servicing and repairs carried out by service specialists, and it is important to clearly establish what is required both in the short and long term. Thinking ahead could provide a variety of benefits, from both a safety and performance

perspective, and help thwart potential problems before they arise. Preventative maintenance, reducing the risk of equipment failure, may not only aid equipment reliability, but may also help create a safe working environment by potentially reducing the possibility of safety hazards associated with equipment failure.

Of course, the type and level of maintenance required will vary dependent upon the equipment being used, from heavy earthmoving machinery to a range of ancillary equipment put to use across different projects, and it is important to reference operator manuals, and to also engage equipment specialists as required. Work health and safety is a multifaceted, interconnected and ongoing process, and it is certainly worthwhile seeking out expert advice on how to develop safe, effective and productive procedures. **///E**