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Tire tips for loggers

It makes good business sense—and financial sense—to get the most from the tires on your logging equipment. Logging and Sawmilling has a few tips on how to do exactly that.

By Dennis Munns

When the price of a single replacement tire for a harvester or skidder can run as high as $5,000—and every tire repair costs you valuable production time—it's just good business to make sure you're getting the most from every tire you put on your equipment.

How much do you spend on tires every year, including replacement, recaps and service calls from your tire supplier? An effective tire management program can cut that cost by as much as 50 per cent, and it takes just a few simple steps.

Check Tire Pressure Every Week

This is the simplest, least expensive way to extend tire life, but it takes attention to detail.

Know the tire manufacturer's recommended inflation pressures for every machine in your fleet. Most manufacturers' manuals recommend different

pressures for different applications, loads and working conditions. So it's important to know the specific recommended pressure for each machine and tire.

The recommended pressure is a "cold inflation" pressure, so always perform your tire checks first thing in the morning.

Even a "healthy" tire can lose pressure over time; so weekly checks are a must.

Cold weather can reduce tire pressure by as much as 10 to 30 percent, so be especially watchful as the seasons change.

Maintain Your Work Surfaces

An essential factor in tire management doesn't involve the tires themselves but the surfaces they roll on. Keep skid roads, haul roads and landings clear of debris such as rocks that can cut treads or sidewalls, and fill potholes and ruts that can hide debris or cause excessive wear. Like pressure checks, these simple, cost-effective steps can prevent expensive repairs or unnecessary replacements.

Use the Right Tires for the Right Applications

If several machines are available for a specific job, ask yourself, "Which one has the best tires for this application?" A machine with narrower tires may be better suited to work in an area with hard soil, for example, while wider tires are better for softer soils or swampy conditions. A radial tire typically has a 10 per cent to 15 per cent larger footprint than a

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bias-ply tire of the same size. Again, follow the tire manufacturer's manual for inflation.

You might want to switch tires to better match a specific machine to the job. A couple hours spent switching tires can pay off with improved productivity in the field.

Make Tire Management a Priority

If you can't do it personally, choose a trusted member of your staff to "own" your tire management program—to be responsible for your fleet's total tire life, maintenance and costs.

A good place to start is a one- or two-day "tire school" sponsored by most of the major tire manufacturers. Ask your tire supplier, or contact a manufacturer directly to identify available sessions in your area. There, your tire manager will learn from the experts about applications, load/speed/surface variables, inflation, preventive maintenance and other factors that underlie an effective tire management program. He or she can then share that knowledge with all your supervisors and operators to ensure everyone is working together to get the most from your tires.

Effective tire management takes an investment of time and effort, but it can pay real dividends in reducing overall costs and increasing productivity.

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