Mean Maintenance

Did you ever see machines with peeling paint, tin cans under the oil leaks and clearly jury rigged repairs? What about duct tape (not just on ducts!), rubber bands holding things together or open electrical boxes overflowing with wires. Where would you think you are; some 3rd world country? Nope you are right here in the good old USA.

You are in an organization that has taken on a new (or really old) maintenance strategy called M2 or Mean Maintenance. Mean Maintenance is the grabbing by the throat and throttling any attempt to spend a cent more than is absolutely necessary on maintenance, asset refurbishment, or support and training.

Mean Maintenance is sometimes the results of ignorance, sometimes the result of a business strategy and sometimes the result pure unfettered short term greed.

Ignorance is the easiest to fix (if you are inclined to take action). Case studies, news reports of catastrophes, ongoing training of management of the concept of pay me now or pay me later and there being , no free lunch. On the plus side be sure to publicize your successes, when you catch something before failure. If the parts are small enough clean them up and bring them to meetings to pass around. Finally, this is not subtle, whenever there are articles of executives going to jail or getting sued for plant practices, be sure to copy and distribute copies.

Some organizations are in businesses where a legitimate business strategy is to go cheap. They might eke out a living by cutting corners, by buying equipment off the scrap heap and getting it to work and going with used parts. These kinds of operations usually look this way visually and are populated with mechanical and electrical handymen who pride themselves on getting the job done no matter how it looks or what they have to work with (like the ‘A Team’ of maintenance). It is always a frustrating environment. Occasionally you are rewarded with an outrageously creative save (like using a cut in half pick-up truck to run a saw mill- true! Not pretty but does the job).

The worst by far is the manager who knowingly loots the maintenance budget to make themselves look good. These people are scary because they can undo a decade of good maintenance practices, seemingly save the money and run to a new ‘better’ job before the sh\*t hits the fan. They might very well be heroes to the executives who see costs plummet and profits sky rocket for a few quarters. But if we look long enough they have not really saved money just deferred the problems (which are now quite a bit bigger and more expensive). They are the bane to the honest maintenance leader who is left having to clean their mess up.