

# Tips for Maintaining Pneumatic Piercing Tools

## USAGE AND GROUND CONDITIONS REMAIN KEY INDICATORS FOR SCHEDULING MAINTENANCE

BY BRENDA SILVA

**W**hen it comes to extending the life of any tools and equipment used in construction, the importance of regular maintenance cannot be overstated. However, with products like piercing tools that are designed for durability, attention to maintenance is often overlooked as contractors focus on completing projects on schedule.

Because of this, minor replacements can become major repairs, and profits lost due to repair downtime can end up boring into your bottom line.

### WHAT CONTRACTORS SHOULD KNOW

With new responsibilities added to their to-do lists every day, even contractors can forget things from time to time. However, industry professionals are eager to remind contractors about the most important things to remember when it comes to the maintenance of piercing tools.

“Piercing tools are some of the most durable pieces of trenchless equipment,” says Chris Brahler, president and CEO at TT Technologies. “That also makes them a prime candidate for neglect. I often think because the tools are so durable that it becomes easy to forget about maintenance. They get tossed around, thrown in and out of the backs of pickup trucks.”

Brahler says small things can extend the life of a tool.

“Replacing the whip hose is one example,” Brahler says. “Often that hose is used as a handle for the tool. That will limit the life of that particular piece of equipment. Also, maintenance depends on the amount of usage. If tools are working a lot, more regular maintenance will be required. But we’ve had customers that have 15 or 20 years’ use on their piercing tools and they’re still going.”

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Ben Ferguson, sales manager at Footage Tools, offers four items that contractors should focus on for the best maintenance of pneumatic piercing tools: “regularly scheduled maintenance, depending on amount of use and/or undesirable ground conditions; proper lubrication to prevent unnecessary wear and to ensure proper tool operation/performance; don’t drive over compressor hoses; and don’t use compressor hoses as pulling devices to remove stuck tools.”

Making regular maintenance even easier for contractors to schedule, Ryan Ley, service manager at HammerHead Trenchless, points out additional benefits to his company’s tools. “All HammerHead Moles can be serviced on the back of a truck while at the job site,” he says. “In a matter of minutes, the tool can be disassembled, serviced and thus renewed to perform like new again.”

### WHAT CONTRACTORS TYPICALLY FORGET

While many contractors are proactive with regularly schedule mainte-



A contractor uses a Big Shot pneumatic piercing tool from Footage Tools on a job site. While piercing tools are some of the most durable pieces of equipment in the trenchless industry, contractors should still perform regular maintenance on them.



A contractor sets up a HammerHead Trenchless pneumatic piercing tool on a job. Manufacturers say the best things to remember when it comes to the tools are to clean it, lubricate it and store it correctly.

nance on pneumatic piercing tools, there are still some things that have a tendency to fall by the wayside. As such, any maintenance performed only addresses some of the issues for concern, whereas a more thorough maintenance could prevent additional problems that may prove costly later.

"Most commonly, they forget to keep them lubricated," Brahler says. "Many pneumatic tools, including piercing tools, need to be lubricated during operation. Checking the lubricator before operating the tool is a good idea to help make sure things keep running smoothly. Petroleum-based lubricants are very common and perform well in warm weather. Biodegradable lubricants are also common and perform exceptionally well in cold weather."

Brahler adds that it's the same in many ways to running your car engine without oil.

"It's not going to last very long," he says. "Keeping tools properly lubricated helps them perform at their best in the field and keeps them in good working condition when they are stored. Proper storage is a key component of tool maintenance. Storing tools inside is better than outside. Either way, tools need to be lubricated before storage too. When not in use, they can rust like anything else, especially if they are stored outside."

Ley agrees that lubrication is a key factor to remember as part of a maintenance program, and he suggests it's one of three main items typically forgotten by contractors:

- **Cleaning** — The piercing tool is not cleaned after each use.
- **Lubrication** — The oiler is not adjusted correctly for the piercing tool size, or the oiler is simply out of oil.
- **Storage** — When storing or transporting the piercing tool, they are often stored dry and left open to the elements in the back of a truck.

One other item contractors often forget, according to Ferguson, is compressor maintenance on a regular basis.

### WHAT DO MANUFACTURERS RECOMMEND?

As important as maintenance reminders are from industry professionals, it's also just as important to know what the equipment manufacturers recommend as part of a regular maintenance schedule. Along with servicing as per the manufacturer's instructions, it seems nothing beats a really good cleaning to ensure extended life of the products.

"Depending on the amount of usage, pull them out of the field once a year and clean them out thoroughly," Brahler says. "This consists of flushing the tool with a cleaning agent. In the past, diesel fuel was commonly used as the cleaning agent. But today, many contractors use our environmentally friendly, biodegradable lubricant to clean their tools. It's simply poured into the air hose, and then the tool can be run above-ground until all the debris is out. The flushing procedure may need to be repeated several times. But afterward, a quick wipe down and the tool is ready for storage."

Ley, likewise, notes the important of regular cleaning of tools — as well as prior to storage — as per manufacturer's recommendations.

"Clean the Mole: With the piercing tool lying on the ground, turn the air on to allow the striker to hit in both directions for a few seconds," Ley says. "This allows dirt and debris to exit out the rear of the piercing tool. Lubrication: During operation, the piercing

tool should exhaust a light mist of oil, which coats the whip hose. If the oiler isn't adjusted correctly or the oiler is out of oil, the whip hose will be dripping with oil (wasting oil) or dry (jeopardizing performance)."

Ley adds that with storage, the tool should be oiled by pouring a few ounces down the whip hose and tipping the tool side to side, allowing the striker to move the oil throughout the inside of body. Placing a gel cap over the end of the hose will prevent dirt and moisture from entering the tool during storage.

Contractors who pay close attention to regularly schedule maintenance of pneumatic piercing tools will see the greatest return on investment and benefit the most from their performance and long life. The unappealing alternative for forgetful contractors is pricey repairs and replacements that can dig themselves deep into equipment budgets and company bottom lines. ▼

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