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EFFICIENT VEHICLE PARTS MANAGEMENT

How one maintenance operation is using a flexible type of parts storage system that evolves as its operations do

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A clean, well-organized shop helps to keep efficiency and quality at its best.

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Equipto's V-Grip storage system addresses the unique storage issues of dedicated equipment/parts departments.

To reduce downtime in servicing new and existing vehicles in automobile, truck and farm equipment parts rooms, maintaining efficient parts availability – from tiny screws to bulky fenders to heavy engine blocks – is critical. But cramped spaces and the continual introduction of new vehicles and parts, along with new part sizes, shapes, weights, quantities and configurations, can make efficient parts management difficult if traditional inflexible storage methods are used.

The City of Philadelphia has found that using a new flexible type of storage system starting from raw shelving and evolving as its fleet operations do, allows its fleet parts managers to create denser, more space- and labor-efficient parts storage capacity as business, budget or storage needs change.

TRADITIONAL STORAGE

While traditional modular drawer cabinets on casters are fine for technicians to roll around the shop, their main drawback for parts storage is that they are essentially unchangeable steel boxes, unable to efficiently accommodate changing part sizes, shapes, weights, quantities or configurations, says Bruce Donatelli, a supervisor with the City of Philadelphia's Office of Fleet Management.

Once the size of the drawers and box frame is set, modular drawer cabinets have virtually no future adaptability, as different size drawers are not typically swapped out to better meet changing part size or shape, space usually isn't used effectively, he explains. For instance, storing washer-sized parts in 6-inch drawers wastes a large amount of storage space.

Though traditional storage shelves offer more space than modular drawer cabinets, a tremendous amount of storage space can also be wasted if, for instance, 3-inch-high parts are stored on 24-inch-high shelves, Donatelli adds. Because moving a shelf to create denser storage space can often require removing and reassembling 10 or more nuts and bolts, this is practically never done on a large scale.

"When parts storage capacity lags behind the need, clutter results with parts too often stored on the floor or on top of cabinets and stacked in boxes," he says. "Productivity is lowered if parts are not quick and easy to store and retrieve."

Storage Flexibility

Manufacturers make a lot of changes to part design and shape from year-to-year, observes Donatelli. “To improve productivity, we sought to consolidate most of our parts storage from bulky, traditional shelves on our third floor down to more flexible, space-efficient shelves in our first floor service bays where the work actually gets done.”

The City of Philadelphia’s Office of Fleet Management turned to a flexible modular storage system called V-Grip by Equipto, a supplier of industrial storage designs and solutions (www.equipto.com). Equipto is a business of Consolidated Storage Companies, a leader in storage and shelving systems.

What makes the V-Grip storage system unique is that it starts as raw shelving and allows parts managers to adapt and create denser and denser storage capacity as business, budget or storage needs change, says Robert Ammerman, CEO of Consolidated Storage Companies. The modular storage system is more flexible than modular drawer cabinets or traditional shelves because it is designed so shelves, drawers and other accessories can be interchanged in the shelf cavity.

Since each shelf, drawer or accessory is individually mounted to upright posts using a proprietary bracket system, they are individually adjustable and can be added at any time without disassembly of the unit, he points out.

The V-Grip system begins with heavy duty uprights, and top, bottom, back and side panels. Shelves with up to 400-pound capacity can be added and adjusted at 3-inch increments for storage of bulk items, and items of different sizes.

For more efficient storage of small- to medium-sized parts, drawers in 3-inch increments can be added, along with drawer or shelf dividers to keep small parts from mixing, says Ammerman. For more security along with visibility, locking and see-through doors in various combinations can be added.

“The option to add or adjust shelves, drawers or other accessories as needed should help us maximize storage density where it is needed most, next to the service bays, even if part sizes or configurations change,” Donatelli says.

VERTICAL STORAGE

While multiple rows of adjustable shelving accommodated the bulbs, fuses, hoses, filters, brake pads and other small- to mid-sized automotive items that Donatelli wanted to house near the first floor service bays, he also needed more space to store larger items. So, he went up.

“With the V-Grip storage system, we at least doubled our storage in a limited space,” he says. “We added vertical storage with a deckover mezzanine above our shelves with stair access. This gave us the room we needed for bulky items such as doors, hoods, fenders and body panels.” Adding vertical storage with a freestanding or deckover mezzanine is straightforward, if adequate vertical space is available. No bracing is needed. The storage just needs to be reconfigured to put a second floor right on top of the shelving.

MOBILE ISLE SYSTEM

For shop parts facilities that lack enough vertical space to add mezzanine storage above shelving, but still need to maximize their storage density, another option is to put existing shelves on carriages and platforms to create a mobile aisle system, says Ammerman.

Mobile aisle systems move the shelves toward each other to eliminate unnecessary aisle space, he says. Reducing the number of access aisles can save as much as 50 percent of floor space, or double existing storage capacity.When needed, a mechanical assist drive system requires only 1 pound of effort to move 10,000 pounds of mobile aisle load on a system such as Equipto’s V-Grip.

STORAGE SECURITY

Another advantage of mobile aisle systems is how easily they provide additional layers of storage security for high value items, says Donatelli. To lock the entire system down, just roll the mobile aisles together and lock the end carriage.

Since such a lockdown can be accomplished with a single key, the system is quick to lockdown and quick to get back in use for higher productivity on the shop floor, Ammerman adds. An additional layer of security can also be added with optional lockable doors in the shelving.“Maximizing our storage space allowed us to consolidate most of our upstairs parts operation ownstairs in a much smaller space,” says Donatelli.

“Now, our technicians have fast part access right in the service bay. They no longer have to travel three floors up and three floors down to get a part.

“We’re more productive, and it won’t be long before we achieve our ROI.