

What is the best soap and method for fleet washing?

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Photo courtesy of Paul Kassander, www.MobiClean.com & www.PowerWashStore.com

This is a topic that has been hotly debated in chat rooms, on forum boards and at round table discussions for years. And the fact is there is no single best truck wash soap or method.

The best soap is the product that gives you the best results for the job and regulatory situations your business has to deal with. This may change from quite often to hardly ever.

Here are five things you have to consider to determine for yourself which soap is the best fleet wash for each job:

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1. Do I have wastewater issues to consider that cannot be easily fixed with just reclamation or containment and filtration?

If so, you may first want to see if the job can be done effectively with a “green,” near-pH-neutral product or by using a two-step, wastewater-neutral process. Remember, though, that even when using a 100 percent “green” product, the materials that are being washed off the vehicles WILL NOT be “green.” You may still need to deal with filtration or other issues. More on two-stepping later.

2. Is the soap going to require that the washing process take too long or take too many steps to complete to be cost effective?

- For instance, is the soap a one step that requires no brush and that can be sprayed on and rinsed off?

- Could the soap itself cause an additional step – like having to use an aluminum brightener – for polished surface areas dulled by the use of the wash soap?

- Is a two-step method the best option from the start?

- Should the soap be a safe finish product that won't harm poly coats, glass, chrome or aluminum?

3. Is the soap easy and safe to use for equipment and operator?

You need to find the right balance for you and the job you are doing.

- Can the product run through the pump or must it be downstreamed?

- Will you need to take extra safety measures – i.e., goggles, wet suit, waterproof shoes, etc.

– to use a chemical strong enough for really tough work? Other times the best cleaner can be as safe as plain water.

4. What will the final cost be to use the soap you choose?

A product's cost should not be the biggest factor in what you choose. You can buy an expensive product and end up using only a few ounces, spending less than a dollar a gallon, compared to another inexpensive product that must be used at full strength and ends up costing you dollars per gallon.

5. How good will the vehicle look once washed? How long will it last?

- Should the soap or the rinse include a wax for improved results? Because, face it, if soap does only a fair job of cleaning and does not get you the lasting results the customer wants, they will find someone else to do the work.

What about two stepping?

When fleet washing first started, the main method that was used was two stepping. Over the years it lost favor to one-step products due to perceived cost, labor and time considerations. But with more and more wastewater BMP issues, two-step washing is on the rise again. Two-step cleaning has been called the most cost-effective method more than any other fleet wash method for these reasons:

- It requires less physical action from either labor or equipment, saving labor and equipment costs, maintenance and repair of equipment, and time.
- It is more environmentally friendly since wastewater becomes nearly neutral as high pH and low pH balance each other out, thus saving on some of the costs when reclaiming.
- It has more predictable results in multiple weather conditions, allowing two-step cleaning to be used in more locations nationally for most of the year, thus allowing effective scheduling and ability to meet contract time lines. Because the pH reaction is not changed much with temperature changes.
- It cleans irregular vehicle surfaces as with curved tankers, slotted livestock haulers, garbage trucks with intricate mechanisms, wheel hubs and frames, again saving on labor and time. Detail brushing and cleaning are not needed.

How two-step washing works.

First a positively charged (low pH acid) detergent is applied to saturate the debris on the vehicle surface and is allowed a short dwell time.

Second, a negatively charged (high pH alkaline) detergent is quickly applied to re-wet and saturate the positively charged surface debris.

After a short dwell time, allowing the molecules to become neutral, the surface is rinsed free of the debris or "road film." High pressure is not needed, just good flow volume, to completely remove the two detergents and debris.

There is a varied, time saving form of two stepping, which can be used when a one-step high alkaline wash product will be used that might white out or streak high polished aluminum areas, like fuel tanks, trim or steps. These areas can be pump sprayed with an acid cleaner just on those areas instead of the entire vehicle just prior to the regular wash. This will allow the polished aluminum to be cleaned but not white out since the products will cancel each other out pH-wise, just like with a normal full two-step wash.

For most mobile fleet washers, this last partial two-step method is becoming the method of choice.

Linda Chambers is Brand & Sales Manager at Soap Warehouse. Linda enjoys writing articles for industry publications, blogs and social media. Visit the company's website at www.SoapWarehouse.biz.



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