

Chemical Savings

How to get more value from your Chemical Purchases

The chemicals that you use in your wash are part of your on-going expenses. They can be a source of problems or profits depending upon your management of them.

Selecting Chemical Products

First you should always purchase chemicals that are designed for your specific applications. Use tire cleaners for cleaning tires, but not for a presoak. Being "creative" with chemical products can not only be wasteful but also could lead to hazardous misuse of some products.

Next, understand the difference between cost per car and cost per drum. Buying the cheapest product may not provide the savings that may appear to be there on the surface. As with everything else in life, you get what you pay for. A product that cost half as much per drum as a premium product will probably have less than half of the active ingredients of the premium product. What really matters is how much does it cost you to wash a car and get it clean, or provide the proper protective treatment.

Purchase the proper size container for your use rate. Buying a 55-gallon drum to get a better price per gallon makes sense if it is a product that you use a lot of. However if that drum is going to sit open for 6 months or longer, it has a greater chance of being contaminated or changing through evaporation/humidity. The money that you saved per gallon could well be lost through waste. Evaluate your car counts and use rates for each application and purchase a container size that makes practical sense.

Ultra Concentrates are becoming more popular all of the time and may be a way to increase your chemical dollar's value. Obviously, packaging and shipping costs are less with the Ultra Concentrates, but that does not guarantee that your chemical costs will go down if you switch to these products. Because the cost per ounce is so high on the ultra's, any waste through container residue, spillage or misuse will be expensive. For some applications, formulation of very high concentrations becomes more difficult and more expensive to produce. It may indeed be less costly to use a product of normal concentration. Again you should balance that cost against the convenience and ease in handling of the concentrated products. There are ultra's that can be a good value for the operator, but they must be carefully selected and managed properly.

Equipment Factors

Even though you have selected the proper product and are running it at the optimum dilution ratio, you may still be wasting product. If your equipment is not in proper working order, the product waste can be significant.

Nozzles are the most common culprits. As nozzles wear, they allow more volume to pass through them and as volume increases, so does your chemical consumption. It is important to have nozzles that are in good shape and sized properly with the correct pattern to provide the coverage needed to get the job done with minimal waste.

Make sure all foot-valves, check-valves and metering devices are working properly and adjusted for best effect. When these systems malfunction the effect can be wasted product, inconsistent results or even product contamination.

Many applications inject air into the solution stream to produce foam and decrease overall solution volume. This is a good strategy, but if the air volume and pressure are wrong, you can atomize the solution and have it blown away by the slightest air currents and the product never actually reaches the vehicle.

Check your water softener regularly to be sure that it is functioning properly. Testing the water is the best method

to ensure the softness of the water. Just because there is salt in the drum does not mean that the water is soft. Some products are more sensitive to hard water than others. Applying these hard water sensitive products without the use of soft water is little more effective than just pouring them down the drain.

Solution Application

With all products work within the manufacturer's recommended guidelines. Running products too weak will generally provide sub-par results and running too strong is both wasteful and potentially hazardous to vehicles, equipment, and personnel.

For some products, once you have dialed them in to the desired use rate, all they need is an occasional check to be sure they haven't changed. Many products, particularly the presoaks can and should be adjusted to match your cleaning conditions for the best overall solutions value. In general, frictionless cleaning solutions demand more attention for maximum value.

Seasonal changes are probably the most predictable issues. You should increase solution temperatures in the winter and decrease them in the summer. The optimal dilution ratio for any specific cleaning condition requires some experimentation and experience.

Winter used to be the "easy" cleaning time, but the use of new types of ice melting compounds being applied to roads has made winter cleaning very difficult in some areas.

The key is to find a solutions distributor with a knowledgeable chemical solutions representative in your area. That is without doubt the best way to get product use advice that is most suited for your area of the country. A good solutions representative has experience developed from servicing multiple different washes in your area and they make it their business to know what configurations are performing the best at any given time.

As with any business, success goes to those who learn to manage their operations the most efficiently with customer satisfaction in mind. For car washes, managing their solution use is one of the most important factors in providing customer satisfaction while getting the best value from their resources.