

Who takes care of your insulated boom after the testing is done?

If you test your aerial truck's dielectric integrity annually, but don't address maintenance between tests, read this article.

Utilities have a variety of programs to maintain the integrity of their boom trucks. Sometimes overlooked is the regular maintenance and cleaning of the fiberglass boom between annual or semi-annual dielectric testing and service. **Who removes the hydraulic fluid, pine pitch, road tar, and other contaminants that build up during the normal exposure of the boom, and how do they do it?**

Dirt accumulated during normal use can affect the dielectric properties of your boom. These include road debris, salt spray, hydraulic fluid, grease, pine pitch, creosote, and more. When residue builds on the boom, water sheets out rather than beading up and running off. This pooling or sheeting of water on dirty booms can keep the booms from meeting dielectric standards and potentially pose a hazard in the field.

What does your company use to clean fiberglass booms? Common degreasers or solvents can actually harm and strip the gel coat on the boom causing weak or soft spots. Many crews have access to solvents and they know how well these solvents remove grease. They may not know the harmful effects solvents can have on the fiberglass portion of the boom arm or bucket. Some cleaners contain abrasives and leave a considerable residue. Others, like acetone, xylene, and toluene, can cause permanent damage if left in contact with the surface for too long a period. These solvents are also flammable and have other hazards. Personnel should be trained on the proper products for use on the boom and bucket areas to keep the truck in proper working order.

Mild, non-abrasive, low-residue soap in warm water is the safest way to clean your boom arms. For the hard-to-remove dirt you need to get off before the washing, try the B-1 Boom Wipe from American Polywater Corporation. The B-1 Wipe is a large towel saturated with a cleaner that will not harm the gel coat or leave a residue, but it does a great job on the contaminants mentioned above. The ready-to-go wipe package is easy for line personnel to keep on the truck for immediate usage. Never use abrasive pads for cleaning tough dirt areas. These pads scratch the boom and remove the protective gel coat layer.

Once your boom is properly cleaned, a good wax is in order to protect the surface and force water beading during misty or wet weather. American Polywater manufactures a specialty fiberglass wax available in pint cans or individual towelettes. All products that are used on your boom truck should be approved by the aerial lift manufacturer. Cleaners and protectants designed specifically for fiberglass booms are recommended.

Companies should follow boom truck manufacturer guidelines on the frequency of dielectric testing, proper cleaning practice, and other maintenance procedures. The ANSI A92.2-1990 Standard (Section 5.4.3) also addresses proper dielectric testing intervals and field inspections for aerial truck testing.

By following manufacturer and industry guidelines on the maintenance of boom trucks, **your aerial fleet will be safer and last longer.**