

What you need to know about lube skids

Commonly used in construction, lube skids are also popular in equipment rental, oil/gas, and agriculture industries

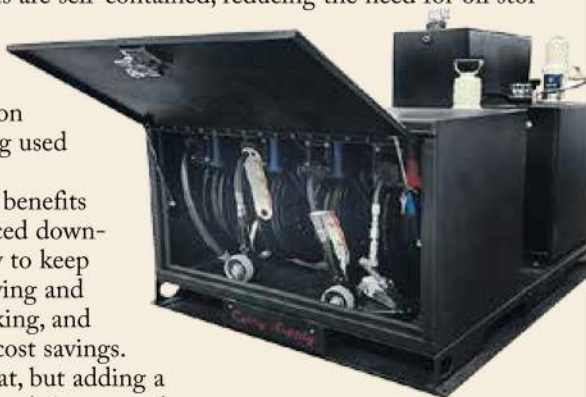
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Bringing equipment back to the shop when it's time for an oil change or a simple maintenance task isn't the most efficient use of a service truck mechanic's time. It's also costly — if one factors in the revenue lost from taking a service truck off the road.

As an alternative to dedicated lube trucks or lube trailers, lube skids allow fluid to be safely provided on a jobsite to keep service trucks out in the field — without having to leave for routine service. These units are self-contained, reducing the need for oil storage lockers and containers. They also include collection tanks for storing used fluids.

All of these benefits add up to reduced downtime, the ability to keep equipment moving and employees working, and transportation cost savings.

Not only that, but adding a lube skid to a truck increases the technician's capability for service and repair, says Jeff Shaw, sales manager with Curry Supply in Martinsburg, Pa.



A lube skid provides flexibility. Photo courtesy of Curry Supply

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“Lube skids are ideal for applications where mobility, flexibility, and moderate use are factors,” Shaw explains.

Commonly used in construction for fluid top-offs, lube skids are also often seen in the equipment rental, oil/gas, and agriculture industries.

“Rental maintenance is a huge player,” says Aaron Sage, chief operating officer at Sage Oil Vac in Amarillo, Texas. “They’ve got equipment out there in use, but they may or may not have the contract to maintain it.”

Generator maintenance is a specific rental maintenance category that benefits greatly from lube skids, says Sage. Constant oil changes are often required for peak power generators or backup generators installed in vital buildings, such as hospitals.

Lube skids can be transported on a flatbed or in the bed of a pickup; they’re easily loaded and unloaded as needed. They can also be integrated into a box truck or crane body truck. Allowing for service in the field, they essentially act as mobile lube solutions that let mechanics and operators complete fluid top-offs, emergency maintenance, or primary lubrication when large fluid volumes aren’t required.

The industry is filled with horror stories about loose jugs and large drums spilling out of truck beds, resulting in tens of thousands of dollars (or more) in fines. Lube skids can also help solve that problem. With environmental issues becoming more



Lube skid fits snugly.



Lube skid is lifted onto the deck of a service truck.

of a focus, no company wants to deal with the negative publicity associated with spilling oil all over the road or at a job site.

“You see so many service trucks going down the road with five-gallon buckets and nasty drip pans and drain pans — and even 55 gallon drums in the back,” Sage says.



Sage Oil Vac model 2M060 used for remote oil change on trucking fleet
Photo courtesy of Sage Oil Vac



Hoses are arranged neatly inside the lube skid. Photo courtesy of Curry Supply

Sage Oil Vac Lube Skid control panels allow for centralized control of all lube skid functions, allowing tanks and equipment to be remotely operated.
Photo courtesy of Sage Oil Vac

As enclosed systems, lube skids can reduce the chance of spills as well as dirt infiltration.

Pick the perfect package

Lube skid packages are available in a range of options and sizes, from small packages for half-ton pickups to packages for class 8 service trucks. They typically hold less fluid than a lube truck or lube trailer, but lube skids still versatile enough to be valuable for large and small fleets alike. With large fleets, a lube skid can service a few pieces of equipment brought to a job site before work begins or equipment left behind once most of the work is finished.

The typical package involves either a hydraulic or compressor pumping system. But Sage Oil Vac's lube skids don't involve the traditional lube set-up.

"Our systems use tanks you can pressurize to dispense oil, which allows you to vacuum used oil from equipment," Sage explains. To accommodate the vacuum component, the tanks are thicker (which can also translate to heavier) — but the lack of pumping system makes the weight difference a wash.

Service truck operators can vacuum fresh new oil into the system before they dispense; they can also vacuum-fill the tank at a faster rate. With no pumps, there are fewer moving parts (and hopefully fewer maintenance problems, too). Because you can vacuum in from a central location, Sage Oil Vac lube skids can be placed anywhere on a service truck without worrying about accessibility.

"You often talk about putting a lube skid in the back of a service truck, but they can be all the way at the front of the work truck body since you don't have to reach them," Sage points out. Several Sage Oil Vac systems have centralized fill and dispense points located on the truck, with the tank located elsewhere. A control system in the service truck allows mechanics to vacuum fill, control air pressure, and monitor tank pressure from a single point.

Curry Supply offers two standard lube skid options: a 40/40/60 gallon package (two 40-gallon product tanks, a 60-gallon product tank, and a five-gallon tank for grease) and a 50/50/100 gallon package. "Depending on the particular application and the products to be carried, a lube skid can be assembled to meet specific needs," says Shaw. Curry Supply can customize lube skids to include different tank sizes or combinations.

Built with fork pockets on all four sides, the skids enable easier lifting and maneuverability. They can easily be placed in position either in a truck bed or on the ground — even when full of fluid product — thanks to the four accessible lifting points. Curry Supply's skid, product tanks, and enclosed reel compartments use Raptor liner for increased protection and durability; radius tank corners help eliminate weak spots.

Valley Industries, a Hastings, Neb., manufacturer of lube skids for 20 years, builds lube skid packages ranging from a one-tank used oil system up to as many systems as requested, says Shane Erickson, sales and marketing manager at Valley Industries. The company features a Build-A-Skid form on its website where potential customers can

view the variety of tank options, tank capacity, pumping options, and other requirements available. Valley Industries' typical lube skid package can be installed in approximately two hours.

Lube skid packages can also be modified and adapted to include items like air compressors and generators to run drills and welders, or other devices. Some service truck operators have also chosen to incorporate power washers into their skids so they're always available.

The determining factors

Before you jump on the lube skid bandwagon, there are several factors to consider when determining which lube skid package will truly fit what you need.

"There are companies that say, 'I want a lube skid with two 80-gallon tanks,'" says Sage. "But if they really look at their maintenance situation, they may not need 80-gallon tanks; they may only be using five or seven gallons at a time."

Considering how many maintenance jobs you want to complete in a specific time period will help you narrow in on the type of lube skid package that will work best. Other important considerations, says Erickson, are visibility and location of specific equipment on the service truck.

You should also evaluate the empty weight of your service truck, the dimensions of the bed, and the gross vehicle weight rating of the service truck. Shaw also recommends thinking about which types of fluid products will be used as part of the lube skid package. Before any decisions are made, "we strongly recommend that a needs assessment be done with a reputable provider of lube skids," Shaw emphasizes.

Cost can be a determining factor as well when deciding what type of lube skid package you require (or whether it's even worth the investment). There are many variables, ranging from job applications to available options, that will ultimately determine pricing. For a fairly common lube skid package (a 60-gallon tank with two 30-gallon fresh oil tanks), Sage says you can anticipate spending between at least \$6,000 and \$10,000, depending on the type of package. "It really boils down to what the operator needs, what their fleet looks like, and what their specific job tasking is for the equipment they're maintaining."

In conclusion — getting started

If you choose to incorporate lube skids into your service truck fleet, don't forget that the skids themselves will also need maintenance from time to time. A broken part or cracked oil tank can place the entire skid in danger of breaking down (or cause a fluid spill).

"It is instrumental to implement an effective preventative maintenance plan to keep everything moving forward, and lube skids are a giant step in the right direction," Erickson says.

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