

Maintain your monitors  
just like you care for your car

## Servicing gas monitoring instruments

By DAVID D. WAGNER

**E**ach day as you take your portable gas monitor to the field and put it to use, you rely on the fact that it's in good working condition to protect you from unseen dangers that may lurk in

your environment.

You count on the functionality of this instrument daily, just as you count on the fact that your car is in good working order and will take you safely to your destination and back again each day. Just like your car, your gas monitor relies on proper maintenance

and service to ensure that it's working properly and will provide you the information you need to perform your duties and protect your safety if needed.

When you get in your car in the morning, you place the key in the switch and activate the ignition. You hear the engine come to life and you look at the dashboard to verify there are no warnings or lights indicating a problem, and that all of the gauges have come to life. You have just performed the daily bump test on your car. You do it every time you get behind the wheel.

The gas monitor on your hip needs the same type of bump test to verify that it's working properly. Turn it on, expose it to a known source of gas and verify that the sensors, indicators and alarms work properly. Just like in your car, this bump test needs to be done every time you use your instrument.

### Preventive maintenance

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Your gas monitor requires a similar level of preventive maintenance. Most gas monitoring instruments have filter membranes that protect sensors and pumps from being damaged by excessive dirt and moisture. These filters need to be replaced periodically.

Your instrument might provide you with a warning light to indicate filters are clogged, or it can be indicated by faulty performance during the bump test. You're best served if you inspect and replace filters on a routine basis.

Your instrument also requires periodic routine calibration. Most manufacturers of gas detection equipment recommend you calibrate your instruments at least every month. Some recommend that you calibrate quarterly, every six months or at even longer intervals. If you read the owner's manual in your glove compartment, most manu-

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facturers recommend that you change your car's oil every 7,500 miles (read it, it's true).

In reality, how many of us allow it to go that long? Considering what's at stake when you are carrying your gas monitor, how long do you want to go without calibration?

### Sources of service

So who performs the service needed on your car?

The days of the backyard mechanic working on his own vehicle are all but gone. Beyond the scope of routine maintenance, there's very little you can do to

service your vehicle without taking it to a manufacturer's certified repair outlet.

Although most gas monitors today are designed and constructed to allow some level of service to be performed by the end user, beyond routine maintenance and calibration procedures, why would you want to have your instrument serviced by anyone other than the manufacturer?

Would you take your GM vehicle to a Ford garage for repair? Certainly not! You wouldn't want to consider sending your gas monitor to anyone for service other than the original manufacturer, either. Typically, only the manufacturer knows about potential prob-

lems that need to be updated and fixed that you don't know about, or issues that may need attention soon.

When you perform your own service on your car, it usually ends up costing you when you have to take it to the garage to undo what you have just done. Your gas monitor is no different. Instruments routinely are sent to manufacturers to have problems corrected that would have been covered under the warranty — before the units were damaged by do-it-yourselfers.

### Lessen your liability

The liability associated with servicing your own gas monitoring equipment is huge. Labels on the instruments generally provide a warning that "substitution of components may affect intrinsic safety."

It's true. Only the OEM components and sensors may be used in your instrument if you want to keep the certifications and warranties valid. The saying goes, "Keep your GM car all GM." The same applies to your gas detector. In fact, third-party certification agencies such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL) do not support anyone other than the manufacturer servicing certified equipment.

Service from your manufacturer is convenient. With the levels of express shipping services available today, an instrument requiring repair can be in the manufacturer's service center the next morning. Many times, the instrument can be repaired and returned the next day or even the same day. Some manufacturers even provide mobile services in many local areas that are available to come on-site on a routinely scheduled basis or on short notice when needed.

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### Replacing components

Finally, the last thing the salesman tries to do when you buy a new car is sell you the extended warranty package. It's always expensive, and when you buy it, you are betting that something on the car will break that is ultimately covered under the extended warranty plan. If the transmission goes, you get the value from the warranty. If it doesn't, you may have paid for nothing.

Some manufactures offer extended warranty programs on their instruments. These programs generally cover the consumable components of the instrument such as sensors and batteries, and guarantee the cost of ownership of the monitor over a fixed period of time. The difference between these programs and the extended warranty on your car is that there is no doubt that you will replace these components on your instrument. Why not guarantee the cost of them now rather than later?

There are many choices available for servicing your gas monitoring fleet. Do it yourself, use a third party, have the manufacturer service the product. Be sure you take the considerations outlined here into account, whatever you do, and be certain that you receive the best service available. | **ISHN**

David D. Wagner is general manager, Service Operations, Industrial Scientific Corporation.