



Cover yourself

CM looks at how you should take care of your sheeting system and what the consequences could be if you fail to act

By **Ben Harrington**

way to powered ones, making the task of load covering even easier and quicker. Today, every new tipper and bulk transport vehicle comes off the line fitted with some sort of load covering equipment.

There are plenty of different systems on the market, but it's important to ensure the right type is fitted, specifying one that suits the particular application and

WHEN THE FIRST manually operated tipper sheeting system was unveiled in the mid-1970s, it got a mixed reception from operators. Some welcomed it as a breakthrough which would replace the dying art of roping and sheeting as well as speeding up deliveries and improving safety. Critics, however, argued that it would be one more thing to go wrong – the extra weight would reduce payload and the cost couldn't be justified.

Sales of such systems were modest for a few years until, in the 1990s, a raft of health and safety at work legislation came in, combined with stringent environmental protection requirements.

After a while the early manual sheeting systems gave



the kind of work the vehicle is likely to be doing.

Most bodybuilders will supply and fit any of a number of different makes of sheeting system, but it's worth looking at all the model options before deciding on the final specification. Dawbarn, for example, offers eight separate systems, giving a choice of side-to-side or front-to-back operation.

Consequences

The maintenance-free Wraptor2 features self-contained hydraulics with a dedicated power pack, while the Rollover is a manual version which nonetheless offers a watertight seal, good heat retention and, of course, load security. There is a winged version for moving-floor, ejector or tipping bodies, as well as a lightweight Hydroclear side-to-side model that is suited for heaped loads and offers good heat retention.

Although sheeting systems aren't the most sophisticated pieces of kit, like any mechanical device they need to be maintained and kept in good order to ensure they do what they are meant to do. A failure of the hydraulics or a seizing up of any of the moving parts could lead to costly downtime, while a ripped sheet, which allows the load to discharge while the vehicle is being driven, could lead to prosecution. ■

● **Ben Harrington is sales director at bulk sheeting systems manufacturer Dawbarn & Sons.**

Checks

It's essential that any sheeting system is used correctly and that simple maintenance checks are made, as regular attention will pay dividends.

Side-to-side

- Always open the sheet, where possible, before tipping to avoid the risk of a vacuum forming and centre pole being bent;
- do not open or close the sheet while the vehicle is moving or in high winds;
- do not operate the system while tipping;
- do not travel with the sheet in the open position;
- do not operate the system if the load is above the height of the front and rear domes;
- inspect the sheet daily for wear or damage, and repair or replace if required;
- check the oil level monthly, which should be 50mm below the filler point, and do not overfill;
- change the oil every 24 months;
- check all of the hose connections and fittings for tension and leaks;
- check and clean all electrical connections.

Front-to-back

Front-to-back systems, with their cable operation, are more complex and require a bit more specific attention. Every two to four weeks the following procedures should be performed:

- check the tension of all the cables;
- clean and lubricate all the cables;
- inspect the sheet itself for tears, cuts, abrasions or worn areas;
- check the cable condition, looking for frayed wires, cuts, rust etc;
- inspect all hardware, making sure fasteners are tight;
- check the length of the sheet;
- check the security of cable clamps;
- check the alignment of the rear bow;
- check all hydraulic connections and the oil level;
- check and clean all electrical connections;
- every six months the cable clamps should be removed and that area of cable inspected for corrosion or broken wires. If necessary, the cable should be replaced. The drive shaft bearings should be greased too;
- every year the cable should be replaced as well as any damaged fasteners. It should be noted that in a few weeks following installation the cables will stretch so it's important to ensure they are regularly tightened.

For any major repairs it is recommended that operators take the vehicle to a competent repair centre or, better still, the original manufacturer. After all, they made the product in the first place and so are best equipped to put it right. At Dawbarn, we have a record on our database of every sheet and tarpaulin we have made. This means an exact replacement can be made when required.

Look after your sheeting system and it will look after you.

Sheeting systems, be they power or manually operated, are a boon for operators, speeding up loading and tipping times while ensuring driver safety. No more climbing up to throw a sheet over with all the attendant risks. However, when operating the system care should be taken to avoid clothing or arms and legs coming in contact with moving parts.

Improper use or lack of maintenance of the system can not only impair operation, it can cause premature wear of the sheet and be potentially dangerous. With regular maintenance and sensible usage, a sheeting system will give years of reliable service.

