

Chris's Corner: Shared Responsibility

This month's Chris's Corner is something I have written about before in a different way, but it is become more and more relevant every day.

When it comes to protecting your equipment and more importantly following the terms and conditions on your new piece of equipment's warranty, whose responsibility is it?

Ultimately, one would suppose that it falls on the owner of the equipment, but I disagree. I believe it is incumbent on the manufacturers, the manufacturer's reps, the dealer community and the service company to communicate every step of the way the precautions, contingencies or actions the end user needs to take to not violate the terms of their warranty.

As a warranty servicer I have seen many instances in the last few years where manufacturers will not cover repairs under warranty because a machine was not installed per the manufacturer's recommendation and/or certain preventative maintenance procedures were not followed.

In the situation of my business we are often called in for the warranty repair. In some, not all, instances this is the first we have come to find the machine was sold into our territory. So at this point it is a little late to tell the customer it was installed incorrectly, being misused or they should have something else integrated into the installation to protect the machine.

Some cases of abuse, misuse, etc are obvious from the get go and we are forced to tell the customer that the required repairs to their machine are not covered under the warranty and we will refer the

customer to their owner's manual, which probably hasn't ever been read, and point out what the customer did wrong. We then have to charge them.

In other instances, we will submit a claim to the manufacturer for warranty repairs and they will be outright rejected or more often we have to find out additional information to substantiate our claim.

In particular, steamer and boilers can be troublesome to us and the end user. Most manufacturers of these types of machines insist on a water treatment and filtration accessory be installed with the machine. Moreover, many companies specify their own brand and model and maintenance frequencies have to be followed to not void the machine warranty.

Too many times the end users are unaware of this requirement. Ultimately whether a manufacturer's rep or a dealer sales rep is selling the equipment, it is incumbent upon them to understand the machine warranty and subsequent ancillary actions that need to take place to ensure the customer is protected. When specifying or selling a machine the customer needs to be told that in addition to the price of the machine that they need to purchase a specific water treatment solution. It is part of the purchase and needs to be installed when the machine is installed.

Once the water treatment system is installed the system needs to be maintained a certain frequencies. This needs to be communicated as well.

Many times I have been forced to be the bad guy and inform the customer that although they have a system, it is not the recommended

system. Or perhaps although they have the correct system they haven't descaled or changed filters per the manufacturer's recommendation.

It is a tough situation for my company and for the customer, when we have to inform them that although the machine came with a five year boiler warranty, the cost to replace the boiler and the boiler itself aren't covered because proper systems, procedures and documentation are not in place. That can be an \$8,000.00 repair for a machine that cost in excess of \$25,000.00 only a few short years ago.

When this happens the customer is irate. They're mad at the manufacturer, manufacturer's rep, the dealer and us, the service company, because they were not properly educated and sold at the time of purchase. Everyone loses when it comes time to replace this machine down the road. Chances are it won't be the same brand because of the this customer experience.

If all businesses in the supply chain want to keep and retain customers they have to realize the sale is only the beginning of a hopefully long term relationship. Good, honest communications upfront and along the life of the machine make happier customers. They might spend a little more upfront and in maintenance, but their machine and their investment are protected.

Everyone is responsible for this taking place.