Section I: Introduction

Just as any other operable equipment, flagpoles must be properly cared for if they are to perform satisfactorily over a period of years. The maintenance of modern flagpoles consists principally of preserving the finish of the pole shaft, replacing the halyards if and when necessary, and properly caring for, and perhaps replacing, certain fittings that are subject to wear. Compared to the older wood and steel poles, however, the amount of maintenance needed is generally small.

Section II: Pole Shafts

The maintenance required to preserve the shaft finish depends upon which metal the pole is made of, the type of finish used, and the conditions of environment in which the pole is located.

Aluminum

Aluminum poles may have a mechanical finish, an anodized finish or an applied organic coating. Whatever the finish, little or no maintenance will normally be required because rainfall in most areas will remove the dirt and soil that may be deposited on the surface. However, should a build-up of dirt and soil occur, washing the surface with a mild detergent is advised. This is the only maintenance ever required for Architectural Class I anodized finishes or for high performance, thermally cured, organic coatings. In the case of brushed mechanical finish, if the surface appearance becomes objectionably discoloured by contaminants, the finish may be restored by the use of special cleaning agents. Aluminum wheel cleaners have been found to work well.

Steel

Because steel flagpoles are finished with some type of applied coating, most of them sooner or later require refinishing. The life of the coating depends on the pre-coating preparation of the metal, the type of coating used, and the atmospheric conditions to which it is exposed. Coating life expectancy ranges from 2 to 3 years for ordinary field-applied paints to perhaps 20 years or more for the sometimes specified thermally cured high performance coatings. For the conventional painted finishes periodic maintenance should be provided whenever the paint becomes dingy or rust spots appear. Rust and loose paint should be removed, bare spots primed, and a new coating applied. For installations in seacoast locations or corrosive industrial atmospheres, the rust resistance of steel can be greatly increased if the pole is hot dip galvanized before painting.

Bronze Alloy

Most bronze poles have a lacquered statuary bronze finish. Over a period of several years, the length of time depending on atmospheric conditions, the lacquer coating gradually erodes and oxidation causes the surface color to darken. Thereafter a natural patina develops. If such a patina is the desired effect and often it is then little or no maintenance is required. However, if it is desired to prevent the development of the patina periodic maintenance is essential, and this involves a yearly oiling with a mixture of lemon oil and high grade paraffin oil. In rare instances it may be desirable, for some reason, to restore the original finish. This can be done by stripping down to bare metal and applying a new chemical finish.

Stainless Steel

Stainless steel poles require little or no care to maintain their finish indefinitely. For esthetic reasons only, occasional washing may be desirable in some locations, but otherwise they are maintenance free.

Section III: Halyards

Conventional external halyards should be checked every three months for signs of wear and need for replacement. The cost of replacement can be minimized if they are replaced when wear first becomes apparent, before a break occurs. This can be accomplished without climbing the pole. Simply butt the end of the new rope to one end of the old rope and thread a fine wire through both, at about 1" from their ends. Then tightly wrap the wire around the rope over the 2" length and cover the resulting splice with a layer of tape. Finally, carefully hoist the joined ropes up the pole, over sheave and down to the starting position.

When replacing becomes necessary it should be recognized that although manila and cotton ropes have given good service over the years, the modern synthetic ropes are far superior. Braided polypropylene and nylon are generally recommended as the best halyard materials, because of their strength, mildew and rot resistance, and exceptional wearing qualities.

Section IV: Fittings

The amount of maintenance care required for flagpole fittings depends upon the type of halyard system provided.

With *conventional external halyards,* about the only items that should be checked periodically are the flag attachment devices on the halyard. If these become damaged or cease to function properly they should be replaced. Truck assemblies are designed to be maintenance free, and other items such as finials, cleats, cleat boxes and halyard protectors require no attention, either, under normal circumstances.

With *internal halyard systems,* however, periodic inspection to ensure trouble-free operation. It is recommended that the winch be inspected at monthly intervals and the following items be checked for wear at the same time:

Halyard cable (check for kinks or frays)
Cable fittings, including flag attachments
Counterweight cover and attachments
Restraining sling
Mounting bolts (check for tightness)

The cable should be replaced if found to be kinked or frayed. The sling should be replaced when worn, the counterweight when its neoprene cover shows excessive wear. Other parts – cable clamps, shackles, flag attachments, winch door lock – should of course be replaced when found to have excessive wear or are not functioning properly.

Section V: Precautions

Halyard rope, regardless of type, should never be used as a means of hoisting a person aloft. Only a qualified workman with proper equipment should be allowed to climb a flagpole.

A locked cleat cover insures against tampering with the halyard at the cleat, but does not prevent vandals from cutting the rope above the box (or even above a halyard protector). Do not use sash chain or wire rope to prevent such vandalism, because they will damage the shaft finish.

The beating of metal flag snaps against the pole shaft, when the flag is not attached tends to damage the shaft finish. When the flag is removed, wrap the halyard around the pole in a few long spiral turns, to prevent the noise made by the wind whipping the halyard against the pole, and position the flag snaps near or on the cleat.

For further assistance, contact your Prospec sales representative.