

Pressing Tip #9

PADDING REPLACEMENT FREQUENCY



How often should padding be replaced? There are at least two categories to consider - outer pad/cover and the underpadding. The outer/pad cover may also include the airbags or they may be a separate item. The underpadding is typically a flexsteel or Monel 1/2" to 1" thick (when new), made of woven layers of steel wire. Some newer underpadding may be made of a thick rubber like material. Covers are a cloth outer layer, the outer pad is typically a felt or felt-like layer about 1/8" to 1/4" thick when new. Airbags are a high strength synthetic-type material made to expand and retract with injected air.

Outer Pads / Covers / Airbags: Certainly, replacement frequency varies with the amount of use per day / hour / week. In a one-shift operation, running 8 hours per day, the effective life of outer covers and pads is no more than 5 to 6 months. The cover may wear slightly faster. Symptoms of worn padding include leave-off marks along the shirt side at the transition from the pad to the airbag, rough spots where any undulations in the underpad may show through, diagonal creases from the collar to the sides, and small impressions of buttons and pockets that are pressed into the padding showing through on the garments.

Wear and life of padding can vary from operation to operation. Frequent or heavy use of starch can shorten the life of covers. They tend to break down or stiffen as the starch builds up. Also, if the press is a vacuum hold down model, the airflow through the pad / cover suffers which makes loading more difficult and contributes to errors and unwanted wrinkles.

Airbags can last 3 to 4 months, or possibly as long as outer pads and covers. Excessive airbag pressure can hasten their demise, as well as cause other press quality issues. Airbags eventually fail with small slits in the material, and will cease to expand. Typically one side will fail and the result is an unpressed side and increased

leave-off marks. Another issue with airbags, lint can stick to the inlet air fitting. Sometimes this will cause a failure to inflate. Other times, the bag will inflate, but not deflate. On successive press cycles, it can actually over-inflate. A simple cleaning of the air fitting can save the day.

Underpad: The steel underpad usually lasts much longer than the outer padding. Manufacturers generally recommend replacement every 1 year of use at 8 hours / 5 days per week operation. The underpad resists wear as it is not in direct contact with the heated pressing chests and is insulated by the outer padding and garments. But over time, the pressure of the closing chests starts to compress the material. As this thickness declines, the press adjustment begins to change. Press quality will change and eventually suffer. Impressions made by shirt patterns (placket, pocket, buttons) will start to re-impress on the current garments being pressed. Outer pads and covers, as changed, will decrease in their effectiveness to shield the garment from the increasingly hardening underpad and its long term wear and loss of "springiness." Long term replacement of the steel underpads should be planned for no more than 1.5 to 2 years.

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