

NEWS ALERT

Cortec® Corporation's MilCorr® VpCI™ Shrink Film wraps up the Marines.

Photo and Article courtesy of Hawaii Marine/Christine Cabalo



Christine Cabalo

Using a shrink wrap gun, Pfc. Jerry Cantu, field artillery fire control man, Remain Behind Element, 1st Battalion, 12th Marine Regiment, patches up some holes. The gun uses propane to heat the plastic shrink-wrap cut to fit the hole. Left undisturbed, a shrink-wrapped vehicle may be protected for four to seven years.

1/12 taps into shrink wrap

Christine Cabalo

Photojournalist

It's a wrap for Marines of 1st Battalion, 12th Marine Regiment, since they began testing a new method for keeping stored vehicles in top shape.

Motor pool personnel have already covered 27 pieces of equipment using special plastic shrink-wrap. The battalion is one of the first units in the Marine Corps to test this technique on stored vehicles that will be unwrapped for rapid deployment.

"Once you wrap them you don't have to maintain it as much," said Staff Sgt. Cesar Ponce, maintenance management chief, Remain Behind Element, 1/12. "We're leaving the wrap on for a year, but in the Air Force they've kept their vehicles inside this kind of plastic for as long as four to seven years without any damage."

A resident of El Paso, Texas, Ponce said if the shrink-wrap technique works, the practice could save him and others from constantly checking stored vehicles. With the additional time, motor transportation personnel could focus more on diagnosing broken vehicles, checking inventories and doing other collateral duties. More equipment could also be stored outdoors and in harsher environments abroad, saving space in sheltered areas.

Large vehicles like a Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacement, a seven-ton truck, received the plastic treatment at the 1/12 motor pool earlier this month. All equipment underneath the wrap should still be operable once it's removed, Ponce said.

The process usually takes four hours to cover one of the vehicles, depending on the size. Crews start by removing the vehicle's mirrors and wrapping any of its sharp edges in foam automotive material to prevent punctures once the shrink-

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wrap goes on.

"We actually drive the vehicle onto a piece of plastic we've placed down on the ground," said Pfc. Jerry Cantu, field artillery fire control man, RBE, 1/12. "You have to be careful not to use the brakes much, otherwise you could tear the material. Then another piece goes on top and we seal everything in."

The Marines use a shrink-wrap gun that heats up the plastic to melt and seal. A common gas grill propane tank fuels the gun, and only welding gloves are needed for safety. Cantu, a native of Waxahachie, Texas, said as the plastic heats up it also shrinks so the material becomes very tight. The barrier is one-eighth of an inch thick, and additional pieces of the same material can be melted on within a few minutes to seal any holes. The plastic sheets come in 24-foot wide rolls that are 210 feet long. Ponce said it took roughly 80 feet of plastic to cover large vehicles like seven-ton trucks.

"There are also corrosion emitters we put on once they're covered," said Pfc. Fred Hofts, motor pool vehicle operator, RBE, 1/12. "We put one on for every 5 cubic feet of the space in the shrink-wrap to help regulate the air and water inside so it doesn't get rusty. Vents go in places where air can flow through."

Hofts, a native of Ottumwa, Iowa, said vehicles are in good driving condition in storage. Solar powered chargers are connected to engines to keep them powered up. Ponce said oil and gasoline remain inside their tanks so the vehicle can be used right away.

He said hopefully the gear would be in top shape next year for personnel to use when training in places like Pohakuloa Training Area in Hilo, Hawaii.

The total system cost \$24,000 for the gun and several shrink-wrap rolls. Ponce said the technique could be invaluable if it's able to save time.

"The real test comes next year when we take off the plastic," he said. "We could do back-to-back deployments, then just get the vehicles whipped out ready to go."