

Your Most Expensive Asset

Jeff Dover

Protecting the building itself makes economic sense

Restaurant facility professionals are hired to protect company assets. Over time, all buildings deteriorate due to weather and age. In most areas of the country, the building is your single, most expensive asset, so protecting it makes economic sense.

Most facility managers complete a yearly inspection of the building, parking lot and equipment to determine conditions and develop a capital and expense budget. Yearly building inspections and preventive maintenance can increase the useful life of buildings. Unfortunately, many restaurant owners do little or nothing until a major failure happens, an approach that tends to be very expensive and may damage the brand. This article provides a list of inspections and action items that can keep buildings in good condition, thereby minimizing the large capital outlays that are necessary with older and neglected buildings.

Roofs

Your roof may be the single most important item to inspect periodically. Roof leaks can cause severe damage to the building interior and temporarily disrupt operations. Roofs should be inspected twice a year at a minimum, before and after the winter season, and after severe storms.

There are several types of roofs, such as built-up, membrane, metal, asphalt and tile. The following are general inspection items for all types of roofs:

- Ensure all roof drains are free of debris.
- Look for any standing water or areas that had standing water. Determine the cause, or contact a roofing professional. Persistent ponding water will eventually damage the roof.
- Clean up standing grease on the roof and determine its origin. Eliminate future grease by installing a grease-catching device on the exhaust fan and maintain it quarterly, at a minimum.
- Clean up any trash, screws or other materials on the roof.
- Look for areas showing any signs of deterioration, e.g., wear spots, cracks in the membrane or tears. Have these areas surveyed by professionals and repaired, if needed, before leaks start.
- Check all roof seams for proper adherence. Have them reattached professionally.
- Check all roof penetrations for proper seal. Caulk/repair as necessary.

- Check all gutters and downspouts for proper drain flow. Clean out as required. Ensure they are securely attached to the building and in good condition.
- Check all roof-to-wall connections, looking for any gaps or cracks. Caulk if necessary.

Exterior of the Building

- Check for any cracks, loose mortar joints and stains on all exterior walls. Determine if the cause is normal wear and tear, water intrusion or foundation shift. Repair as required.
- Check for any rotted wood in fascia boards and soffits.
- Inspect exterior paint on all finished surfaces, looking for signs of peeling, cracks and alligating. Sand areas where repainting is required. Proper painting on the exterior prolongs the life of the building at a minimal investment.
- Inspect all windows and frames for any rotting and deterioration. Replace as necessary. This will ensure moisture is kept out of the wall interiors.
- Check windows for proper weather-stripping and caulking. Replace as required. These are inexpensive ways to keep the window structure sound, save valuable utility dollars and minimize drafts inside the facility.
- Check all exterior doors for proper operation, alignment and deterioration. Ensure weather-stripping is in place and in good condition. Proper door conditions are extremely important for safety, keeping out pests and saving energy.
- Check all exterior building light fixtures and signage conditions. Ensure they are properly affixed to the building, clean and working. For energy purposes, switch to LED bulbs, if possible.
- If power is supplied to the building overhead, keep tree branches trimmed.

Interior of Building

- Inspect the attic, if applicable. Look for any stains on the roof deck for signs of possible leaks. Check for proper insulation. View all internal HVAC ductwork, looking for any damage or separation. Examine hood ductwork, looking for any grease leaks and ductwork insulation breaks.
- Check roof trusses for proper structural integrity and condition.
- Check all interior walls for signs of moisture penetration. Look for stains and push on suspect areas to check for looseness. Repair any cracks, peeling paint or wall finishes.
- If a drop ceiling is present, examine all ceiling tiles for any stains. If present, determine if they are from water intrusion or a leaking air conditioning duct.
- Inspect all floors in the front and back of the house for any broken, loose, or missing tiles or grout. Repair or replace immediately, as this could cause a slip-and-fall injury, which is much more expensive than any repairs. If carpet is present, look

for any frayed, damaged or stained areas. Again, repair quickly to reduce any liabilities. Check wood floors for cupping, separation and water damage. If found, repair as soon as possible.

- Check all light fixtures for proper operation, correct color and wattage bulbs.
- Check all plumbing (faucets) throughout for proper operation and leaks. Repair as required.
- Ensure all restroom partitions are securely fastened to the wall and floor. Tighten or reattach, if necessary.
- In the electrical/mechanical room, ensure the incoming electrical line and all breaker boxes are in good condition.
- If gas or propane is used, check plumbing connections for leaks, especially on the cookline. A simple soap test will suffice.

There are other items that may be inspected a few times a year, such as rooftop equipment (HVACs), parking lots and landscaping, but the building itself is a large asset that needs to be periodically inspected and maintained to keep it in good condition. Failing to do so will result in very expensive repairs and could disrupt store operations, hurting your brand.

I'm always looking for feedback. Feel free to contact me at jeff@rfmaonline.com or call at (972) 805-0905, ext. 3.

Dover and out.

Jeff Dover's facilities career started in 1985. He has been employed by several major chains (Ponderosa, Steak & Ale, Bennigan's, TGI Friday's, Fuddrucker's and recently Five Guys Burgers and Fries). His technical education enabled him to take the lead as energy manager, facilities manager and director of facilities at the various brands.