

# From The Inside Out

Jeff Dover

## Cyclical Services

Creating an effective preventive maintenance program at smaller restaurant companies

Most large chain restaurants have a dedicated facilities department that handles all the different responsibilities that go into maintaining and protecting company assets. They have regional facility managers in the field, facility coordinators in the corporate office and normally a director of facilities that oversees all the activities and functions that go into maintaining the stores. But what about franchisees and smaller regional players with only a handful of restaurants?

These companies usually don't have a formal facilities department, but the functions are still necessary. Someone has to oversee the facilities work in the stores. In many cases, the general manager or the area director assumes this responsibility. But this begs the question: Is the work properly supervised?

## The Pillars of Prevention

For any restaurant to operate effectively and economically, there are at least four cyclical, or preventive, maintenance services that must be done:

- Heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) and refrigeration service

- Hood/exhaust cleaning

- Grease trap maintenance and pumping

- Fire suppression inspections

This article aims to assist smaller restaurant chains that do not have facility professionals who oversee these four services. It is intended to act as a guide for whomever is responsible for supervising the preventive maintenance programs.

In addition to the four services above, other tasks may be completed on a periodic basis. These include service on hot-side equipment, roofs, hot water heaters (especially tank-less types), exterior signage, irrigation equipment, parking lots and lighting, as well as plumbing/line jetting, janitorial tasks and exterior power washing.

## Benefits of Preventive Maintenance

People understand the importance of changing the oil in their cars, but some do not apply that knowledge to other valuable assets. Studies have repeatedly shown preventive maintenance done correctly and in a timely manner will:

- Minimize minor and major equipment repair costs
- Reduce equipment downtime, which is especially critical in the restaurant industry
- Maximize efficient operation, lowering energy costs
- Extend the life of the equipment, which maximizes the capital investment
- Enable more consistent store operations
- Protect the brand

### Important To-Dos

The following briefly details the general tasks to be included in a successful preventive maintenance program.

### HVAC/Refrigeration

- All equipment needs to be professionally serviced, at a minimum, every four months. In harsher climates, it should be every two to three months.
- Air filters have to be changed every three months, at a minimum. In dusty climates, they should be changed every other month. Check filters for proper fit with no gaps. Air will move preferentially through the gaps rather than the filter media, potentially damaging coils and fans.
- Both condenser and evaporator coils need to be cleaned every three months, at a minimum. In harsh, dusty climates, this may need to be done monthly. Chemically clean them once per year. Clean coils can save up to 40 percent on energy costs, according to ASHRAE.
- Inspect all belts every preventive maintenance visit or quarterly. Proactively replace them yearly to prevent lost A /C or heat.
- Clean condensate lines and pans semi-annually to prevent water leaks and odors.
- Clean makeup air filter quarterly.

### Ice Machines

- Have coils and interior of the machine cleaned quarterly.
- Change water filters at least twice a year. Store managers should be able to do this.
- Professionally sanitize the interior of the machine and bin at least once per year. Local health department officials are always on the look out for a dirty interior.

### Refrigeration

- Wipe down coil and door gaskets monthly to save energy and prolong the life of equipment.

- Wipe down electrical cords monthly and check for any frayed areas or bent prongs.
- Have equipment professionally serviced at least twice a year for proper pressures, temperatures, etc.

### Hood/Exhaust Cleaning

- Clean the kitchen exhaust system at least every three months. Increased frequency is required if solid fuel (wood) is burned underneath the hood.
- Use only professional, certified hood cleaners with proper and up-to-date insurance.
- Always request before-and-after photos from the hood cleaner showing hood(s), ductwork, fusible links and fans. All areas need to be cleaned down to bare metal, including around the exhaust fan(s) on the roof.
- Always receive a report detailing the work completed and any cleaning issues encountered, e.g., long inaccessible duct runs that may need access panels installed.
- Ensure the contractor provides a sticker or certificate showing date of cleaning, name of service company and area(s) not cleaned.
- Ensure there are no gaps between hood filters. Replace with proper size if needed.

### Grease trap Maintenance and Pumping

- Install screens on all back-of-house floor drains.
- Scrape leftover food into trash containers, not down drains.
- Install screen baskets on sink drain lines.
- Do not pour hot liquids down drains.
- Ensure that any high-temperature dish machines are not piped to the trap.
- Do not use garbage disposals.
- Professionally service the trap as required by local codes, normally every three months. The cleaning should include complete evacuation and visual inspection of tank. The tank should be refilled to the proper level, and the manager on duty should request to see the clean tank.
- Ensure pumping manifests are completed accurately and copies are sent to appropriate personal and local agencies.

### Fire Suppression System

- Inspect system professionally every six months.
- Inspect entire fire suppression system (Ansul) in the hood for proper operation.

- Replace fusible links and nozzles as required.
- Inspect and recharge, if necessary, all portable extinguishers.
- Inspect all emergency exit lights for proper operation and illumination.

These are the high-priority tasks to monitor. For a complete preventive maintenance listing of these four items, visit RFMA's website. Go to "Resource Library" then "Facilities Toolkit." Several RFMA vendor companies can assist restaurant organizations with the implementation and supervision of these critical functions. I encourage you to check them out.

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

Dover and out.

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