

To Plan Or Not To Plan?

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Exploring the pros and cons of planned maintenance programs

As facility professionals, we all know implementing a preventive maintenance regimen for your assets is an essential component for a well-run business model. However, we also know that quantifying the return on investment can be arduous.

Preventive maintenance (PM) refers to establishing a maintenance schedule for all equipment that has the potential to experience wear or to fail prematurely. The main idea behind PM is to prevent failure before it occurs. It is designed to keep equipment operating at an optimal level, thus enhancing reliability.

However, the implementation of a preventive maintenance program can be costly and time consuming. This creates constant debate as to whether such efforts offer notable value. Will all the man hours and money invested in the program outweigh emergency repairs?

Advantages of PM Programs

Companies that rely solely on reactive maintenance are essentially waiting for a problem to happen. From my years of experience, I believe that when a program is properly executed, the overall benefits exceed the costs of a reactive model.

Listed below are multiple advantages that will show the ROI of a PM program are fairly easy to achieve if you track your R&M expenses properly:

- **Decreased risk.** Because the equipment and your building are being regularly checked, there is less overall risk of an unexpected breakdown. This creates a safer working environment for employees. When equipment isn't working properly, it can create hazards, unsafe working conditions and, sometimes, emergency situations where workers are injured. Preventive maintenance improves the safety of equipment and the safety of company workers, resulting in fewer on-the-job injuries and accidents.
- **Better planning.** By following a schedule, you are able to stick to a budget while maintaining your building. You'll be able to track of all your equipment and gain a better understanding when replacement is needed, allowing you to better forecast capital spend. CMMS software can help plan routine maintenance such as inspections, parts replacement, filter replacement, lubrication and more. These types of scheduled routine maintenance tasks can help equipment run more efficiently.
- **Longer equipment/building life.** When equipment is being inspected and maintained properly, it will be kept in optimal working order, extending its lifetime. Routine check-ups on building parts such as pipes, boilers and roofing will help extend the life of your building/tenant space as well. Today's CMMS software helps facilitate preventive maintenance by scheduling maintenance tasks and keeping organized records of all inspections and fixes.

- **Cost savings.** Over time, you will spend less capital money because you won't have to replace equipment, or deal with last-minute breakdowns, as often. While there still may be some unplanned maintenance needed, the likelihood decreases when the building and equipment are regularly checked. Facility managers can use CMMS software to set up a maintenance program, which simplifies the transition from reactive to preventive maintenance and is very cost effective.
- **Reduced energy consumption.** In general, equipment will drain more energy when not kept in optimal condition, hiking up your utilities bills. Properly maintained equipment will save you energy and money. In addition, intuitively programmed lighting and cooling/heating systems will further help lower energy bills. In turn, a company will benefit from fuel and energy savings because equipment will be running at peak performance and as designed.
- **Fewer disruptions.** With regular checks, you won't be surprised when something goes wrong. Most problems will be a quick fix because you will know what needs to be done. You can house the appropriate parts as inventory so you don't have to track them down or wait for shipments. Plus, if a large problem was to occur, you wouldn't have to close down your business or disrupt your employees.

Disadvantages of PM Programs

Conversely, there are a few potential drawbacks of a PM program:

- **More money upfront.** A preventive maintenance plan requires you to spend more upfront as you work to regularly maintain the equipment, instead of simply waiting for things to break down.
- **The concern of over-maintaining.** When there is a regular plan, you may find that some items may not need to be checked as often as planned. However, if this is the case, you can simply change your maintenance plan to check the specific equipment or areas less often.
- **More staff required.** Having a preventive maintenance program in place likely requires more staff, because you'll need someone to regularly check the equipment. This is different than reactive maintenance, where you simply call someone in for a one-time fix.

Determining Maintenance Frequencies

For starters, be sure to trust manufacturer recommendations. They may seem excessive at times, and it can be difficult to quantify all asset life-cycles as they pertain to your particular business. However, manufacturer recommendations are developed by teams of engineers who understand how their products function optimally, regardless of use frequency.

For example, typical HVAC units are installed on buildings in a wide range of geographic locations, from the sub-tropics all the way up to the Arctic tundra. These units face a huge number of variables that can affect maintenance needs. Environmental factors and inclement weather may require increased maintenance, but the recommended maintenance schedule should be a constant. You can increase it from there if need be. As such, determining an appropriate PM schedule is vital in order to obtain optimum equipment operability.

The ideal amount of maintenance for various equipment and facilities is quite nuanced. For example, maintaining equipment may include a preventive maintenance checklist, which includes minor inspections that can significantly extend service life. Maintenance activities on some equipment include partial or complete overhauls at specified periods, plus regular replacement of air filters, refrigeration coil maintenance, oil changes, bearing and hinge lubrication, minor adjustments and so on.

Maintenance frequencies may differ depending on the type of equipment and how much use it gets. Just make sure you're paying attention and caring for your equipment so it doesn't fail you.

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