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Strategies for Success

Eric Schechter

Strategies for Success A repair and maintenance strategy can improve practices that extend equipment service life and reduce costs

Every operator and facilities manager has struggled at least once with the high cost of facility repair and maintenance. As with any business, cost control is a major profitability issue. A repair and maintenance strategy can improve and help develop practices that extend equipment service life and reduce costs. The key is to view repair and maintenance spending just like food and labor costs—as controllable expenses.

Managing Your Costs

Let's explore some of the key principals behind managing these costs.

Establish a baseline. Determine the minimum amount of money required to maintain current conditions. Conducting a spend history analysis may be required. Once the baseline is established, consider this rule: If you spend less than this amount, your facility will deteriorate. In very general terms, 1 to 3 percent of sales should be spent on repair and maintenance.

Spend smarter. Spending more money is not necessarily the solution. Instead be smart about how money is spent and the results you hope to achieve. Above all, your objective is to reduce breakdowns, extend equipment life, reduce energy consumption and reduce interruption to business, which results in lost revenue.

Know the types of repair and maintenance costs. When developing a repair and maintenance strategy, consider the following types of costs:

Fixed:HVAS filter changed,fire system inspections
variable:Unexpected equipment or building repairs
Discretionary:painting,decor wood refinishing
capital Improvement:New equipment,roof replacement

Use the fixed costs for the foundation of the budget,as these ser- vices are recurring and mandatory.

Develop a budget. Start by establishing mandatory service requirements and current costs for these services. It is critical to understand how these costs impact the profitability of the business and what money can be allocated for the facility, beyond mandatory repair and maintenance.

Focus on value rather than cost. There are three factors to value: cost, time and quality. For each type of service required, ensure there is a clear understanding of minimum requirements. Create a work scope that meets the minimum but is not excessive. Make certain you are working with competent service providers and competitively bid out work.

With the pressure to reduce costs, the main priority is management. This requires work upfront to negotiate costs, research providers and develop a strategy.

Manage your information. A successful maintenance program also includes effective document and event management. Keep copies of all service providers' credentials and insurance certificates, service records, warranties, equipment inventories, work orders, invoices, agreements and contracts. Many affordable Web-based solutions exist to simplify the process.

Prevent and Protect

Below are some helpful tips for effective preventive maintenance.

Walk-in coolers and freezers: Keep the doors closed when not in use. If doors are left open for any extended amount of time, ice can quickly build up on the evaporator coils and cause cooling problems. Keeping doors closed will help cut down on unnecessary service calls.

If doors must remain open, consider adding an air curtain or air door to the doorways. Keep evaporator and condenser coils clean and free of dirt and debris.

Commercial ovens: Wipe up spills from your oven cavity daily. This will cut down on rust and corrosion, while also reducing fire hazards.

Steam tables/warmer wells: If your units require the heating element be immersed in water at all times, it is important that the water level in the well never exposes the immiscible element, as this can cause premature failure. Keep the heating elements clean and free of any mineral buildup as this can also decrease the life of your equipment.

Air conditioning/heating systems: Air conditioning is a considerable percentage of your electric bill—typically between 20 to 30 percent—so change or clean the air conditioner filters monthly to save money. Consult a qualified professional at least twice a year to ensure the safe and money. Consult a qualified professional at least twice a year to ensure the safe and efficient operation of the HVAC.

Condenser coils: Keep condenser coils clean on all refrigeration equipment, including ice-making equipment, refrigerators, freezers, salad coolers and air conditioning units.

Keeping condenser coils clean and grease- and dust-free will help save electricity and prevent breakdowns and costly repair bills. Dust can usually be brushed off the coils or blown off with compressed air. Grease buildup may sometimes require a professional service company.

Ice machines: Ice machines are one of the most important pieces of equipment in your restaurant or bar. Keeping them clean will make them run better and cause less wear and tear on component parts, which saves money on electricity as well as excessive repair costs.

Keep your ice machine in good working order with a high-quality, properly installed water filtration system. Change the water filters every three to six months. These measures will help extend the life of the ice machine, cut down on costly repairs and make cleaner, better-tasting ice for customers. Ice-making equipment must be properly sized for your particular establishment's needs.

Ventilation/exhaust hoods: Maintaining clean air filters in your exhaust hoods will keep them working more efficiently, with the motors running cooler. This creates less stress and strain, thereby extending the life of the motors and belts. Ensure scheduled cleaning of all hoods and ducts by a professional service provider. Have your exhaust hood and fresh-air fans checked quarterly for proper operation and belt tension, which allows for peak performance.

Waiting to perform any preventive maintenance on your restaurant equipment results in more costly repairs and/or replacement. Managing repair and maintenance costs take effort, but will pay huge rewards in the long run.

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