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Coming Out of Hibernation

Gordon Bruner

As temperatures warm, review the condition of your property and rectify any damages caused by Old Man Winter

As temperatures warm and the seasons change from winter to spring, it becomes increasingly important to review the condition of your property and rectify any damages caused by winter.

Even if the colder months were not severe, building exteriors, outside equipment, parking lots and walkways may need repair. Avoid emergencies and increased maintenance costs by periodically inspecting your facilities.

Getting Started

Start your inspection on the roof, where cold weather can take a heavy toll. Be certain you inspect the parapet metal caulk and the seals around each and every roof penetration. A weak seal can leak and will likely foster the growth of mold. In extreme cases, it could cause immense amounts of dry rot and damage with continued exposure.

Next, check the heating/air conditioning drain lines on the roof. Snow and ice can crack or break PVC drain lines. Also, be sure to check the units' access doors to ensure the gaskets are in good shape. Proper maintenance of these seals and gaskets eliminates strange outside odors from being cycled back inside. In addition, the system filters should be inspected to make sure they are intact and clean. Regular inspection of your filters will keep your system operating at optimum levels and help minimize the possibility of untimely breakdowns.

The exhaust system is often neglected during winter months, so take a minute to open the hood exhaust and make sure it is sufficiently clear and functioning properly. Closely inspect the system to determine if any repairs are needed to keep it in proper working condition.

Inspect the refrigerant lines for the coolers and ice machines that run to the remote condensing units. Inspect the insulation on these lines to confirm that it is still intact after months of exposure to the elements.

Finally, since cold weather is no friend to rubber and siliconebased products, check all gutters for leaks before moving on to the ground-level inspection. Water that leaks through weak points in the drainage system may result in pools on the sidewalk or moisture that works its way down the siding of the building. Either situation can result in expensive damage to your property or a hazardous situation that requires immediate attention.

A Secure Perimeter

After you've completed a full roof inspection, it is time to inspect the perimeter of the building. Begin by checking for exterior finishes damage. Look for cracked paint or caulk and damaged mortar. Also look for soft wood under painted surfaces, because the wood underneath can rot without being noticeable. This situation can quickly escalate to an extreme level of damage.

Next, inspect the mortar joints of any brick siding to ensure there are no cracked, flaking or damaged areas. Check all the window seals for cracked or dried-out rubber. Similarly, check all the door sweeps and weather seals to ensure they are tight and in good shape. Intact joints and seals will help your restaurant operate at optimum levels with a minimal amount of wasted electricity. Also, look for areas that need to be sealed to prevent pests from entering the building, since warm weather makes insects gravitate to climate-controlled environments.

Walk all the sidewalks, carefully inspecting them for missing joint materials. Repair any flaws for the safety of

staff and customers. The sidewalks also need to be well sealed to keep water from getting under the slab.

Pressure wash the sidewalk to remove salt and leftover ice melt. Then seal the sidewalks. Be careful not to use caustic or acid-based chemicals if you are not planning to seal them. Muriatic acid will cause the sidewalk surface to flake, and the sidewalk will get dirty twice as fast and will be hard to keep clean. Sealing the sidewalk is like putting scotch guard on the concrete.

Another safety issue involves damage to a building's veneer. If water has found its way under stone veneers and froze, it will have left behind gaps in which moisture can accumulate and damage the substrate and building sheeting. If this situation is left unchecked, customers and employees might be injured by falling pieces of rock or finish.

A Final Walk-through

Last, but not least, walk the entire property. Examine the parking lot for cracks or holes. Address any issues quickly as these problems will only get bigger over time.

Activate the irrigation system to ensure there are no broken lines and that the heads are properly adjusted and functioning. Walk the landscape with your landscaper to discuss expectations for the coming months.

End your inspection with a thorough check of the mechanical room. Look for gaps and breaks in seals that will allow unwanted pests to gain access to the building or roof leaks.

Throughout the process, keep in mind it is to your advantage to be as thorough as possible. Understand that even small problems will not improve over time, and it only takes a minimal amount of time and resources to recognize and correct issues, but failure to do so can result in thousands of dollars in damage down the road.

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