

# How Focusing on Maintenance Can Create a Safer Environment for Your Residents

For administrators of assisted living facilities, retirement communities and other senior housing communities, the comfort and safety of the residents is one of the most important concerns. At the same time, however, it's also important to stay on top of the maintenance needs of your building to avoid unnecessary expenditures that could be avoided with a little preventive work.

Fortunately, these two goals aren't opposed to each other. In fact, by paying special attention to your community's maintenance, both proactive and reactive, as well as your reporting and inventory control system, it's possible to greatly improve the quality of life – not to mention the safety – of the seniors under your care.

If you're interested in achieving the best possible resident satisfaction while simultaneously improving your building's operational efficiency, here are a few ways a maintenance-focused approach can help.

## Preventive Maintenance

Ensure the best results from your maintenance overhaul by thinking proactively. You may be tempted to view preventive maintenance as an unnecessary expense that can be put off in favor of more pressing concerns, but that's a mistake. Independent building consultants, zumBrunnen, outlined the importance of preventive maintenance, and how deferring these operations can often add up to wasting more time and money in the long run.

Another building consultant, David Todd Geaslin, established what he calls his "inverse square rule" to calculate how much it will cost to defer a given maintenance operation. Geaslin's rule states that if a part is known to be failing, but is operated to failure without being repaired or replaced, the

### Inverse Square Rule of Deferred Maintenance

"If a part is known to be failing and the repair is deferred and allowed to remain in service until the next level of failure, the resultant expense will be the square of the failed part." - Geaslin

# 40%

of heat-related deaths were attributed to people over 65.

## Safe Food Preparation

1. Keep surfaces clean
2. Don't cross-contaminate
3. Cook to proper temperatures
4. Keep food chilled

# 1 in 3

seniors will experience a fall every year.

cost to replace it when it breaks down, both financially and in terms of labor, will be the square of the cost of the original part. Especially in a senior living facility, it's essential that you don't experience any service interruptions to necessary equipment, as that can lead to dangerous situations for residents.

## HVAC

Your air conditioning use will skyrocket in the summer months, and it's crucial to maintain a regular schedule of preventive maintenance to keep your residents safe. Seniors are especially prone to the negative effects of heat - researchers from the University of Chicago Medical Center found that around 40 percent of heat-related deaths were attributed to those over 65. Your facility's air conditioning is the first line of defense protecting your residents from heat stroke and similar afflictions. Common wisdom says to inspect your HVAC system twice a year, paying special attention to the filters, ductwork, air conditioning compressors and thermostat. Older systems or those with known maintenance issues should be inspected more frequently.

## Refrigeration

Properly functioning refrigeration is essential for preventing food-borne illness, and the heat of the summer may place additional strain on your equipment. Your refrigerators should receive the same regular inspections as your HVAC system. Additionally, establish proper procedure so that your staff responsible for food preparation can do their jobs safely. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recommended a four-step system for safe food preparation: keeping surfaces clean; not cross-contaminating, as things like raw meat can create hazards; cooking to the proper temperatures and keeping food chilled so that bacteria can't reproduce quickly.

## Landscapes, Sidewalks, and Common Areas

Falls present a serious safety risk for seniors. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention noted that falls are the leading cause of both fatal and nonfatal injuries in the over-65 population - around one-third of seniors will experience a fall every year. Preventive maintenance on sidewalks, hallways and your community's grounds can not only save you money, it's essential for protecting your residents. It's common for sidewalks and driveways to crack, especially due to the extreme temperature changes brought by the seasons. Inspect these elements every fall and spring. Fix any cracks or other irregular surface that somebody could trip on. If your facility has any carpeted areas, make sure the carpet is secured to the floor. Older carpets that have started coming loose should be addressed by a professional.

## Reactive Maintenance

Despite your best efforts, you will still inevitably have to respond to unplanned or reactive maintenance calls. The most important aspect of

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dealing with these types of calls is to have an accurate and reliable reporting system that enables you as the facility manager to keep track of what is being fixed where and by whom. Not only can this help you address all the repair issues that need attention, but it can help you avoid doing work twice, or making similar efficiency-killing mistakes.

Effective reporting and work-order tracking has been a source of strife for facility managers previously. The need to keep up with ever-changing maintenance needs frequently extends beyond the capability of simple pen-and-paper systems, especially across multi-building facilities like a senior living community. In recent years, new solutions have emerged, specifically in the world of cloud computing and Web-based dashboards. These programs offer facility managers and their teams the ability to see repair, budget and asset usage information in one conveniently located central location. Additionally, because these systems are online, they can be accessed by anybody with an Internet-enabled device. With such a system, repair teams can update their progress on work orders directly from the field, increasing efficiency tremendously by eliminating the need to return to the office to log data.

Communication is another essential part of effective reactive maintenance. As a facility manager juggling multiple repair calls at once, being able to communicate in real time with your staff, as well as update your systems with new information as it comes in can make a huge difference in time and money saved and, by extension, resident satisfaction. Moving forward, it's likely that mobile devices and smartphones will play a key role in maintenance management. This is due to their capacity to facilitate direct communication. Additionally their internet connectivity dovetails with the need to keep essential maintenance information updated on the fly.

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