



How to Speak Maintenance

Everyone in multifamily should learn to speak maintenance!

Article 2 | Preventative Maintenance

With thorough, well-executed preventive maintenance programs, properties are able to reduce the amount and frequency of maintenance issues and emergencies, particularly after hours. While it may take time to create the programs and educate the maintenance and office teams, having preventive maintenance programs and proactive teams to execute them will lead to a better work/life balance for all of the property's employees, especially the service team members.

One of the best ways to execute a preventive maintenance program is through a proactive, not reactive, approach. Some examples of a proactive vs. reactive approach include inspecting air conditioning units during slower months (like February or March) before they are in use by residents, sending out email blasts to residents warning them of an upcoming shift in weather and outlining ways to conserve their units and energy sources, or tackling maintenance work during turnovers.

Checklists, Processes and Tracking

It's important for maintenance teams to inspect what they expect. By creating individual preventive maintenance programs of the different areas of maintenance (including interior, exterior, mechanical, irrigation and more), there is a well-outlined checklist for employees to review and track their findings.

Regardless of the type of preventive maintenance program, there must be a systematic process in place, either computerized or on paper, for maintenance staff to review their findings. There's not a one-size-fits-all approach to preventive maintenance programs. Programs may need to be reviewed once a year or once a month, and larger companies may be utilizing technology to track their programs, while smaller companies are using paper or spreadsheets.

As long as the programs are being tracked and reviewed in a timely manner, the method used isn't important. However, everyone involved, from service managers and technicians to housekeepers and other supporters, must clearly know their roles in the preventive maintenance programs and what needs to be done and when. Digital or printed checklists are most efficient but offer teams the opportunity to elaborate with notes and comments for a more thorough review.

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A Total Team Effort

While maintenance teams often carry out preventive maintenance (PM) programs, the office and management staff can play an important role in ensuring these programs function optimally. Since they are often the ones taking service requests from residents, there are multiple benefits to having an office staff who can speak maintenance. Not only will they be more confident taking service calls, but it will lead to a better customer service experience.

Management and office staff should be encouraged to join the maintenance team as they are working through a PM checklist, ask questions, walk the property and vacant apartments regularly, and report any issues or problems they see. This will help them better understand some of the more technical aspects of the service team's work.

Ultimately, preventive maintenance helps everyone long-term and needs to be a team effort. With a proactive approach to maintenance and efficiently run preventive maintenance programs, emergency situations are limited, team members have a better work/life balance and employee turnover is minimized.

Key Takeaways:

- Preventive maintenance programs should incentivize service teams to take a more proactive approach and to inspect what they expect.
- PM work should be done during optimal times, such as in off-seasons, prior to drastic changes in temperature or during turnover.
- All team members should clearly understand their role in the PM program, when it needs to be completed and what information is needed.
- PM programs need be trackable, either electronically or on paper. Depending on the size of the company and preferences of team members, each community may implement different programs and tracking methods.
- The management team should be encouraged to join the maintenance team while reviewing PM checklists. When they ask questions and understand the technical aspect of the property, they will be able to better help residents.

"How to Speak Maintenance" is a monthly series that focuses on teaching property managers and office staff how to better understand and appreciate the work and the value of the maintenance teams, eliminate conflict points that come up, and provide better customer service for our residents.

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