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Chapter 1: Maintenance

Fade to a commercial: an auto mechanic (identified as "Jerry" from the patch that is sewn on his shirt) stands in the foreground of a dirty garage holding a simple orange oil filter. In the background another mechanic, named Joe, is rebuilding an engine, its parts scattered all over the workbench. While Jerry extols the virtues of changing the engine oil and replacing the oil filter on a regular basis, Joe makes it clear during the conversation that his work to rebuild the engine is very expensive. At the end of the commercial, we hear the famous tag line: Jerry says, "You can either pay me now," and then Joe stops working on the motor long enough to add, "or, you can pay me later."

That commercial, which was shown extensively in the 1980s, offers a useful summary of the basic concept of "maintenance." In almost everything we do in our management and oversight of a commercial building, it is almost always significantly less expensive to maintain a building system than to repair or replace it prematurely.

What is "Maintenance?"

In order for the building systems to remain fully operational, maximally efficient, and within design parameters, the real estate manager and the building's engineering team need to develop a comprehensive maintenance program.

There are three basic types of maintenance:

- Reactive maintenance
- Preventive maintenance
- Predictive maintenance

To a certain extent, it is likely that most properties include all three types of maintenance in their maintenance programs. However, the degree to which the property dedicates its resources to each form of maintenance depends a great deal on the owner's objective for the property, the staffing level and skill set of the engineering employees assigned to the property, and a host of other factors.

Reactive Maintenance

As the name implies, reactive maintenance occurs when the building system has already broken and has to be repaired after the fact. This type of maintenance is typically the most disruptive to occupants because there is no warning to the occupants that the system will be out of service. In addition, reactive maintenance can be tremendously disruptive to the engineering team members because, when reactive maintenance is prevalent at a property, the engineers no longer control the work schedule—the work schedule controls them. In reactive maintenance, engineers often go from one system failure to another. As soon as they get one component fixed, something else breaks down.

To a certain extent, all buildings employ some degree of reactive maintenance. No maintenance system can predict or prevent failures with 100 percent certainty, and even if such a system could be designed, it would be prohibitively expensive to manage in most commercial buildings.

CHAPTER 1: MAINTENANCE