

The Advantages of Checklists

A Preventive Maintenance System That Really Works

BY CHRISTOPHER LUONGO

Twenty years ago, as superintendent of a Hempstead, Long Island apartment building, Vince Occhipinti would routinely hop out of bed around 6 AM and immediately set off to walk the premises. He would begin in the boiler room. Then he would step into the elevator for a test-ride to the penthouse, before finally taking the long walk down the back stairwell, stopping to inspect each floor for blown-out light bulbs, piece of stray garbage, or crack in the ceiling. All the while he would scribble down notes and make check marks on a maintenance log sheet, for future reference.

“This way I knew what I was confronted with for the day,” he says.

Today, as vice president of management, Occhipinti has managing agents and superintendents under his wing who, he ensures, never break his old habit of thoroughly inspecting their buildings through the use of maintenance checklists. By doing this, he says “they are able to anticipate and solve problems before they become a crisis.”

Occhipinti relies heavily on checklists for various preventive maintenance programs including a daily, weekly and monthly boiler preventive maintenance program. His agents routinely leave their desks to go on property inspections that involve the use of detailed reports, customized for each building. During their inspections, they check for such things as code violations, tripping hazards and lighting fixtures that could be replaced by more energy-efficient ones. The reports are then turned over to the Board of Directors.

“This holds us accountable for work that needs to be done at each building,” says Occhipinti. “Every Board is concerned with results.”

Occhipinti urges agents to carry around maintenance checklists when they do their weekly property inspections, while individual building superintendents fill out separate service logs that track all service and repair jobs. Occhipinti explains these service logs are extremely helpful in proving that an equipment failure was not due to

negligence on the part of the building personnel. He points out how easy it would be for even the most conscientious of superintendents or managing agents to lose track of an item in the long list of building maintenance chores without the aid of some sort of log.

Occhipinti was surprised to discover that many of the buildings his firm takes over had been previously operating without any preventive maintenance programs in place. He says that these same buildings often have histories of problems that could have been prevented had the former management company taken a more pro-active approach towards maintenance.

“This is a chronic problem in the industry,” says Occhipinti. “Many management companies think they don’t need to employ the use of written tools.”

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