

## A Team Approach to Preventive Maintenance By Larry Duncan, CAPS, CAMT, CAMTII, CAS

The National Apartment Association's Certified Apartment Manager (CAM) course defines Preventive Maintenance as follows; "Preventive Maintenance (PM) is a proactive approach to protecting and maintaining the value of property assets. It requires significant planning and is designed to extend the life of equipment, reduce unexpected problems and reduce the likelihood of normal problems becoming more costly ones."

Rather you are on a brand new property or one that has seen, or needs multiple rehabs there is a high probability of maintenance being your most controllable expense. No matter which end of the spectrum your community is in, building a successful preventive maintenance team can help you keep your costs under control. It will also cut down the number of emergency and unbudgeted repairs. Everyone involved in the property is a valued part of the team. From the owner to outside contractors, everyone has to make a commitment to the PM program. The owner must, to the best of their ability, make the resources available to the property team. At the management level, the entire staff should take part in development of a PM plan.

How do you develop a successful PM team for your property? Your weekly staff meeting is a great place to start. Your maintenance supervisor can set the stage by going over all the areas that make up a PM program. On the surface the items that should be included in the PM program look daunting, but when scheduled into the daily activities of the entire staff it becomes routine. The outline below will cover most of the zones that need to be addressed, but should be customized to fit your community.

### Maintenance Zones

- Signage
- Roads and Parking
- Lawns and Flower Beds
- Pools and Play Areas
- Building Exteriors
- Maintenance shops, equipment and storage areas
- Common areas and resident use equipment
- Apartment units with all systems in them
- Offices and staff areas

Each zone will generate lists of items to be monitored. Make a staff inspection of each zone and be sure that every member of the staff learns enough about each item to at least recognize when it is not functioning properly. As each list is developed determine how often the items on that list need to be inspected. For example, sewers and drains, once a year, balconies semiannually, water heaters quarterly, common area lighting weekly and pools daily. Make inspection schedules for each area and assign the items to the entire staff. Obviously you would not assign the leasing agents to check AC compressors,

but they can turn the unit on and make it both heat and cool. Include everyone in the program.. Depending on state and local laws and the skill sets of your staff there may be items that require outside contractors. Many contractors will do scheduled inspections at no cost. When you have all your lists developed and scheduled include them in your weekly staff meeting, go over the results of last week's assignments and the assignments for coming week. Get everyone involved, explain what is expected and inspect what you expect.

A few key factors need to be in place to launch a PM program.

- Everyone needs to make a commitment to program
  - Let everyone on staff take part in planning and implementation of your PM program.
  - Review the plan in staff meetings and work out each person's role in the plan.
  - Take the lead, be the example for everyone.
- One plan will not fit all the property in a portfolio. Customize your plan to fit the age and conditions on your site.
  - Size and location of your property
  - Age of the property and its systems
  - Special needs of your residents
  - Type of equipment and how it is used
  - Staff size and budget
- Keep up the information flow from all aspects of your staff
  - Implementation of your PM plan must be a continuous team effort
  - Provide a central location for PM info and make it a daily point of discussion.
  - Encourage staff to keep each other informed on progress or delays
  - Keep PM updates a part of weekly staff meeting, rotate the report among the staff members
- How can you keep your staff involved?
  - Make sure everyone had a part in planning the program
  - Give everyone a part of the plan to monitor and report on
  - Keep everyone involved in some part of the completed PM work inspections
  - Let the person/s who did the work walk the others through the inspection
- What are the key points in successful operation of your PM plan?
  - Schedule and assign tasks and follow up responsibilities
  - Develop and consistently use checklist
  - Perform through site inspections
  - Inspect and follow up on activities
  - Track and report all phases of the PM program

The key to a fully functional and successful PM program lies in the planning; you must get commitment from everyone from the owner to the painter. Keep the staff involved in

the inspections and reporting, instill pride in your team's effort to keep the property safe and expenses in line. It makes for happy residents, and that makes people happy all the way up the line to the owner. It has been said that "preventive maintenance does not cost, it saves", I prefer to think about the cost of the PM program in relation to the cost of doing nothing. © Larry Duncan 2005

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