

Dear Maintenance Men:

“Preventive Maintenance” is a term I hear a lot and don’t really understand. I do my own maintenance and fix issues as they come up and any “extra” maintenance just sounds like more work and expense! What am I missing?

Bryan

Dear Bryan:

On the surface “preventive maintenance” may sound like unnecessary work done in an already busy schedule. However, that could not be further from the truth. Both on a large or small scale, preventive maintenance or “PM” for short is a huge money saver not only in parts but also in time and labor. An unplanned breakdown is never convenient. The chances are high of a breakdown happening on a Friday or weekend evening after hours. This is the time when the building is under the most pressure as everyone is home. Planning for a breakdown is the first step in avoiding an unplanned breakdown.

Look at your apartment building with a critical eye and list everything that might go wrong at some point in time. This list would include: water heaters, hot and cold water supply lines, faucets, drains, garage door springs, heating and air conditioning, etc. At a minimum you should have repair parts for all the items on your list on hand along with the tools to do the work. If you want to get ahead of a potential breakdown, figure out the estimated lifetime of each item and schedule either a service date for the item or replacement of the item before a potential breakdown. As an example: A 100-gallon water heater without maintenance may last between six and eight years. The same water heater with yearly maintenance of cleaning out the calcium buildup in the tank, inspection of the Zinc rod and burner assembly might last as long as ten to 14 years. Another less extreme example might be cleaning out the main drain lines once a year before the big holiday season. It is much cheaper to have a plumber service your building on a Tuesday morning than on Thursday, Thanksgiving night.

Dear Maintenance Men:

My apartment building has washer and dryer hookups in each unit. One of my residents has installed a new fancy front-loading washing machine and now the pipes are banging. This did not happen with the regular top loading machines. Not only is the noise annoying, but also I am worried this might cause a water line break. The residents love their new machine and I don’t want to tear into the walls, so what can I do to remedy the pipe banging issue?

Victor

Dear Victor:

The reason for the pipe hammering is because of a rapid opening and closing of a water valve. Most washing machines and dishwashers use a fast acting solenoid to control the water valve. The water starts and stops very suddenly causing the pipes to move. The new popular front loading washing machines also use a solenoid to control its water valves, but they open and close many times during the cleaning cycle, so the hammering is more noticeable and damaging. The simplest and least expensive remedy is to install what is called a "Mini-Rester" laundry hammer arrester. The "Mini Rester" is installed either at the washing machine's hot and cold valves, or directly to the back of the machine's inlet nipples. The job can be done in the time it takes to unscrew the hose from the hose bib or machine, and reinstall the hose back onto the machine or hose bib with the Mini Rester in between. These hammer arresters can be found at any hardware store and should be about \$20 each. You will need one for the hot water side and one for the cold water side. The "Mini Rester" is designed as a single fixture remedy. If the problem continues, a larger water hammer arrester will need to be installed.

Dear Maintenance Men:

I am planning to install a new sprinkler system in the lawn area of my apartment building. How do I estimate the number of heads and how far apart do they need to be?

John

Dear John:

First, get an accurate measurement of the area you want to install the sprinkler system. Transfer the measurements to graph paper. Decide on a scale such as one square of the graph paper equals one foot or maybe if you have a large area, one square equals five or ten feet. Draw the dimensions of the area you are planning to irrigate. Next decide what type of sprinkler head you will be using such as impact sprinkler (Rainbird type), brass heads or pop up, or rotary heads such as Toro offers. The manufacturer will list the water spray radius. If you want the diameter the head will cover, multiply by two. But knowing the radius should be enough for this purpose. The spray coverage should overlap each head between 80 and 100 percent. What this means is: if the sprinkler head has a spray radius of 10 feet, each sprinkler head should be spaced 10 feet apart. That is called head-to-head spacing. If you deviate greater than 80 percent, you may get dry spots at the times you need the water the most; such as during summer heat and windy conditions. Stated another way, sprinkler "A" should wet sprinkler "B" and so on.

On the graph paper grid the circles should intersect and touch each sprinkler head. Don't forget the more sprinkler heads you have, the more you will need to pay attention to both gallons per minute (GPM) and water pressure supplying your sprinkler system. The sprinkler manufacturer should have a chart showing how many sprinkler heads can be controlled by one valve depending the GPM at a certain water pressure. Recommended reading:

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<http://www.irrigationtutorials.com>

Note: If you would like to see your maintenance question in the "Dear Maintenance Men:" column, please send in your questions to: [Buffalo Questions@gmail.com](mailto:BuffaloQuestions@gmail.com)

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