

EQUIPMENT SOLUTIONS

a talcott publication

[Home](#)
[Our Staff](#)
[Safety Zone](#)
[Breakthrough](#)
[Prep Central](#)
[Tech Watch](#)
[Space Savers](#)
[Cool Solutions](#)
[Special Report](#)
[Segment Spotlight](#)
[Product of the Week](#)
[Subscribe](#)
[Contact Our Staff](#)
[Reader Service Link](#)
[--- Media Kit ---](#)

published by
TALCOTT

Preventative maintenance pays off over time A penny saved.....

By: Lisa Shames
Thursday, April 01, 2004

When it comes to foodservice equipment maintenance Anthony Rapanotti, owner of A&R Repairs Baker's Kneads, Inc., Detroit, Mich., offers some advice: "Just do it," he says. Sounds simple enough but, it seems, not enough operators are following his suggestion.

"People go out and buy a \$20,000 car and change the oil and take care of it," says Rapanotti. "Then they'll buy an expensive piece of restaurant equipment and do no maintenance at all. They just wait until the equipment breaks down and wonder why."

It's not much different on the West Coast, either. "It's ironic that we get people here every year who say, 'My boiler is bad,'" says Nicole Kidushim, the Southern California Gas Company's foodservice equipment coordinator. "And we ask them, 'Why didn't you take some precautions in the first place?'"

To make this messy job a little easier, we spoke with equipment repair technicians, manufacturers and consultants who know firsthand there's no better way to save on costs and upkeep of a foodservice operation than to identify key maintenance challenges and master them from the beginning.

According to SoCal Gas Co., a Sempra Energy Utility, Downey, Calif., the majority of problems associated with commercial food service equipment can be attributed to two fundamental facts.

First, is the natural tendency for anything to deteriorate. "Even with normal use, any piece of equipment clearly does not stay new," says Kidushim. "This is especially apparent when it is subjected to the rigors of commercial food service." Second is the lack of knowledge among staff and operational management. The best way to implement a preventive maintenance program is to start at the top.

"First and foremost, the owner must demonstrate his desire and willingness to save repair and re-placement costs by budgeting for maintenance," says George Zawacki, senior associate at foodservice consulting firm Cini-Little Inter-national, Inc., Schaumburg, Ill.

"The best thing is to have managers explain how equipment works and how to clean it," says John Southard, technical supervisor for EMR Service, Baltimore, Md. "There is some reluctance since the managers themselves may not be savvy with the mechanics of the equipment." For larger operations, Southard recommends having one supervisor responsible for each piece of equipment—a method he says works well in hotels.

Prior to choosing a preventive maintenance provider, Rapanotti recommends operators review maintenance expense records. "Operators need to get out a pencil and paper and figure not only what it cost to repair a piece of equipment, including parts and labor, but what it cost in down time," he says.

When choosing a provider, Rapanotti, who has owned his repair business for 20 years, advises checking credentials. Technician certification is available through the Commercial Food Equipment Service Association (CFESA), the trade association of professional service and parts distributors. Founded in 1963, CFESA, headquartered in Greensboro, N.C., has certified nearly 3,000 technicians and offers continuing education and training programs in gas, electric and steam foodservice equipment, focusing on type of equipment rather than brand.

Continuing equipment education is also offered at many of the utility companies, including the SoCal Gas Co., which offers numerous courses at its foodservice equipment center. "Equipment Maintenance for Optimum Efficiency" course focuses on how the equipment actually works, what makes it work and what you can do to keep it working well. The four-year-old program has been successful, says Kidushim because "people are realizing that if you do maintenance in-house it saves services calls and



money.”

In many cases, preventive maintenance doesn't have to be a time-consuming affair. "For a lot of equipment, it just requires five to 10 minutes at the end of the day to do simple cleaning," she says. "If you keep it up, it isn't a big deal. But if you wait a month, it can become a big chore."

Once a provider has been selected, the next step, says Rapanotti, is to keep an ongoing dialogue with the technician. "Sit down and spend a half-day with your servicer and tell them what piece of equipment is breaking down the most," he says. "That's the one you want to focus on." Then six months to a year down the road Rapanotti suggests evaluating the maintenance program to see if changes can be made and, importantly, if money can be saved.

Top Offenders

According to the experts, preventive maintenance on steam equipment and combi-ovens should top any operator's list (see sidebar). "One of the big things that customers forget when they put in a new piece of steam equipment is that they should start a de-liming program right away," says Southard. "A lot of customers look over that until they have a problem. With this type of equipment that can be too late."

Any piece of equipment with a water line can require extra maintenance, says Kidushim, and varies from location to location depending on water conditions. If that water line becomes clogged, eventually the boiler will stop working.

Steam equipment isn't the only machinery that needs to be closely monitored. On other types of equipment, Rapanotti offers the following tips:

Gas: "You must have your gas equipment checked regularly for calibration, gas pressure and burner output. The newer, higher efficiency burners use less energy and cook faster, but they also draw in more air and thus more dirt."

Electric: "With electric equipment you need to inspect for burnt or brittle wires and connections. Have servicers check for proper amp draw on the equipment. If anything is wrong, your amp is going to climb. That is an indicator that something is wrong."

Warewashing: "Look to make sure the ware-washing pumps, intake tubes and screens are clear. Also, periodically check to make sure water temperatures are correct and meet board of health requirements."

Mechanical: "All mechanical equipment should be greased and oiled repeatedly. If they have belts, they need to be checked and adjusted regularly."

In addition to following a preventive maintenance program, Rapanotti is targeting installation as another key area to help reduce repairs and equipment downtime. Working with 15 other service companies and two manufacturer liaisons, Rapanotti, a CFESA director, heads a committee to define industry standards for equipment installation. In addition to improved equipment performance and efficiency, he hopes these installation standards could lead to extended warranties in the future. Rapanotti plans on presenting his findings in May at the National Restaurant Association Restaurant, Hotel-Motel Show in Chicago.

When it comes to keeping an eye on the bottom line, preventing problems before they happen is essential.

"Equipment has become more sophisticated so maintenance is even a bigger issue now," says Kidushim. "Maintenance is not an option if you want to succeed and keep costs down." ES