



# HOW WELL DOES YOUR SAFETY PROGRAM MEASURE UP?

Consistently providing a safe environment for guests and employees is imperative. Injuries, lost work time, lawsuits and lost business are not acceptable options. What is the best way to prevent accidents before they happen? Implement an effective preventative maintenance program. Proactive hoteliers who have done that have discovered that what gets measured stays safe.

"Your guests deserve an evenhanded presentation of service *and* safety," said Ray Ellis, professor and director of the Loss Prevention Management Institute at Conrad N. Hilton College, University of Houston.

Measuring the readiness of fire sprinkler systems, fire extinguishers and emergency lighting is a given to ensuring safety in a hotel. However, it is just as vital to check routinely the hundreds of other systems and items that could potentially pose a hazard to guests and employees.

Maintenance personnel have long used paper-based systems to plan, track and monitor preventive maintenance tasks, rounds and work orders. Such systems have done a reasonable job in helping to maintain a consistent level of safety. The downside, however, is that they lack fail-safe ways to record that an actual task was performed.

## High-Tech Solutions Ensure Safety

Several systems entered the market in recent years that automate the preventative maintenance, rounds, work order and room inspection processes. One such product is WinTrack PM, a mobile solution produced and marketed by the Dunedin, Florida-based Mintek Mobile Data Solutions. This system incorporates the use of barcodes for equipment or other items and mobile, handheld devices for data collection.

"WinTrack PM adds accountability to the entire preventative maintenance process," said Mark Sokol, director of product marketing for Mintek. "It also automates scheduling."

When performing a pressure test on a sprinkler system valve, the engineer scans a barcode next to the valve with a handheld device. That scan prompts a series of steps—visible on the handheld—for the engineer to take. For example, the handheld might ask, "Did you test the pressure?" After the test is completed, the engineer then would scan another barcode, ending the test.

If a system's reading does not fall within a specified range, it can automatically generate a work order. That work order data, along with recordings of every step performed during the maintenance task, is recorded within the system for later

analysis. A manager can quickly run a report on that round and determine if any of the valves were missed.

Preventative maintenance tasks, rounds reports and work orders also can be viewed on-line anywhere in the world once the handheld device is synchronized. Because the barcode is scanned twice during the procedure and important questions must be answered on the handheld, it ensures employee accountability.

Barcode scanning systems also can be effective in monitoring emergency lighting, back-up generators, smoke detectors, guestroom locks, electrical systems and kitchen equipment. By routinely checking refrigeration equipment, one can have peace of mind that food is kept safely.

## System Promotes Accountability

David Rutledge, assistant chief engineer at the Marriott Tampa Westshore, explained that any piece of equipment looked at on a regular basis will be a safer piece of equipment. He said his hotel has been using a handheld scanning system to monitor not only kitchen equipment but also fire extinguishers, sprinkler valves, and gas and electric equipment.

"This type of tool forces you to go to the piece of equipment and scan it," he said. "It ensures that the engineer was at least there."

Where appropriate, automated maintenance systems also help ensure that proper lock-out and tag-out procedures are followed. Being prompted to follow specific procedures for lock-out/tag-out ensures that OSHA requirements are met. It also enables a safer working environment.

## Safety Starts at the Top

No matter what technology is implemented to strengthen safety conditions, it will only be effective if it is part of an overall maintenance management strategy that emphasizes leadership and empowerment. Top-level managers must make safety the highest priority every day and employees must be empowered to do whatever it takes to guarantee not only their own safety but that of their customers as well.

"There has to be true dedication and motivation at the highest level," the University of Houston's Ellis said. "Managers should think of safety as a profit center and not a cost center. If you can go through a year without minimal incidents, you become a profit center."

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Glenn Hasek, president of Hasek Communications, is a freelance writer and public relations consultant based in Cleveland, Ohio, (216) 476-9663, E-mail: hasekcom@aol.com.