

# The Importance of Technical Maintenance Planning & Implementation to Facilities Management.

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While the term Facilities Management can mean many things to different people and organisations, it is always important to remember the management of the technical aspects of a facility that can sometimes be pushed aside in the daily grind of Facilities Management, and responding to the internal or external clients' needs.

The daily grind often means reacting to the client's "political" requirements and the areas of greatest immediate concern. Whilst non technical day to day issues such as cleaning and security can be very important to the client and its operations these should not overshadow the need for effective *and legally compliant* ongoing technical maintenance management.

If we don't ensure the technical aspects remain a high priority and allow them to be pushed down the priority list, the Facilities Manager can often revert to reactive maintenance practices and end up constantly playing catch up. This results in circumstances where issues can not be rectified easily, or cost effectively, or within an acceptable time frame.

The lack of adequate attention to technical maintenance has the potential to:

- Have a large impact on the clients business and/or staff.
- Create industrial relations issues.
- Affect the client's opinion of the facilities manager and their relationship.
- Create a non compliant facility.

Lack of focus on technical issues and maintenance can also be one of the quickest ways of ensuring a Facilities Management internal or external relationship is affected, an external contract is not renewed or even cancelled.

The management of technical issues in facilities is becoming less straightforward as the level and integration of technology in buildings increases and the extent and complexity of relevant legislation and regulation grows. The following areas are often problematic in the management of the technical aspects of a facility:

## **Supervision and Auditing**

Ensuring that effective supervision of technical works and maintenance tasks is carried out can be challenging for a non technical Facility Manager. Good supervision is required to achieve the required technical quality and compliance to internal agreements, client contracts and legislation. Whether the supervision is resourced internally or contracted it is equally important that regular auditing of the actual processes and works is conducted. This should be carried out by competent and experienced technical facilities management staff, either internal or independent contracted auditors. Good quality record keeping and reporting is essential within this process, especially in an increasingly litigious industry.

## **Budgeting and Cost Control**

As with all business, the Facilities Manager has to contend with a finite budget and limited resources. Without adequate planning and effective management processes this can lead to only the "squeaky wheel" getting the attention and result in expensive longer term issues.

The following pointers can help avoid budgetary and cost control problems.

- Have access to appropriate and sufficiently broad based technical experience whether this be in-house or contracted resources. This capability will help ensure the efficient and effective use of funds and limit the likelihood of surprises against budgets.
- Technical operational management staff need to have the correct experience. Narrowly based or non multi-skilled staff are not adequate in today's increasingly complex facilities.
- The Facilities Manager and staff should have a thorough knowledge and correct understanding of relevant legislation and contracted responsibilities.

- Continuing compliance with the contract and regulations should be assured through regular reviews and auditing.
- A clear understanding of the clients needs must be acquired at the start of the contract or at the commencement of internal agreements, not over time as things progress.
- Initial and longer term funding must be sufficient for the known scope and envisaged contingencies. Insufficient funding or unrealistic fee for service arrangements will create stress on relationships and can result in service and quality shortfalls.
- Scheduled resourcing reviews should be carried out regularly in conjunction with the client to ensure that the changing requirements of the internal or external client are continuously addressed.
- If possible have a mechanism in place with the client to adjust budgetary funding if the client's needs change. This arrangement is more cost effective for the client in the long run than fixed budgets and the resulting limitations and pressures on service delivery. It also provides a greater level of surety of budgets and or profitability for the Facilities Manager or contractor.

### Coordination for Compliance

Difficulties and conflicts sometimes arise between various maintenance tasks and contracts. These can affect the smooth or thorough execution of maintenance activities, and even result in a non compliant building. A prime example relates to essential services and the common requirement for the coordinated and integrated operation of fire protection, mechanical and building automation systems. These systems are usually maintained by separate entities. Does each arrive on separate days with differing views of what is to be achieved and what tests are to be undertaken or do the various contractors interact seamlessly and correctly? Do the service personnel performing the works actually know the legislation and what is in the contract? Can they inform the facilities manager from their tests whether or not the integrated systems are operational?

One of the biggest challenges for the Facilities Manager in this area is to ensure that all parties have a full and accurate understanding of the legislated requirements, not general opinion or past practices, so that the service provided is integrated across the trades, and is comprehensive and coordinated. Standard industry practices often become standard contract conditions and methodologies. These often do not meet the compliance requirements of legislation leaving the client and the Facilities Manager at risk.

Monitoring and auditing by knowledgeable technical facilities management staff is important to ensure maintenance compliance and that works are being completed correctly and with sufficient quality.

*Dear Valued Client*

*I thought the chiller and air handling system was being correctly maintained and I'm as surprised as you are that the Air Handling Units do not meet capacity due to poor maintenance, and that the main chiller failed in the hottest week of the year, and it will take 6 weeks to repair.*

*We were also unaware of the increased equipment load and the fact that the level of air conditioning and electrical supply is insufficient.*

*I'm also sorry to hear of your need to relocate your critical operations due to this issue.*

*We regret that our response to your request for the past 3 years of water treatment records does not meet your requirements; the records are the standard contractor document. We are also asking the service provider for copies of the missing records.*

*As to your request for the last maintenance audit report, it was over 2 years ago, unfortunately we can't find the records and the particular Facility Manager has left. Sorry.*

*Yours sincerely*

*I was just too busy.*

An appropriate and continuing focus on technical services will ensure that the facility remains cost effective, within budget, at the standard required, compliant with the law, and with reduced risk to both the client and the Facilities Manager.

**BUT DON'T FORGET THE CLEANING!**

**David Mcilraith** is the Operations Manager of Integrated Technical Management Pty Ltd.

*Integrated Technical Management specialises in the provision of coordinated and integrated technical services to direct clients and the Facilities Management and Property industry. These services include operational management, technical support and advice, and maintenance of mechanical and air conditioning systems, electrical reticulation and infrastructure, fire protection, central energy plants, critical power supplies, water and waste systems, building automation, security systems, lifts and escalators.*

*Integrated Technical Management fundamentals:*

- *prime focus on client objectives and imperatives*
- *minimized risk to operations*
- *quality service and staffing*
- *regulatory compliance*
- *building efficiency*
- *environmental responsibility*
- *asset protection*
- *accurate reporting and record keeping*

*David Mcilraith has over thirty years experience in the Engineering and Facilities Management fields, from a practical trade base to Marine Engineer and National Facilities Manager. David holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Facilities Management from RMIT and his previous responsibilities have included the operational and strategic management of critical and commercial facilities including large national portfolios.*

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