

Rental Watch

Dear Maintenance Men:

I have a 12-unit apartment building that is cash flowing. I have reviewed my maintenance expenses for last year and I am looking for ways to lower my maintenance bills to help increase that cash flow. Any ideas where I should start?

Bill

Dear Bill:

If you have cash flow at your building, sounds like you did not do enough maintenance! All kidding aside, look over last years maintenance records and divide them into maintenance categories. As an example: plumbing, electrical, roofing etc. Then subdivide each group into routine maintenance, emergency maintenance and capital improvement. This will make reviewing your records easier.

If you have a large amount of emergency maintenance, you need to analyze the work and find the root cause of the problem. It might be a lack of routine maintenance, too many residents per unit, or uncoordinated or haphazard maintenance schedule.

If you have a high cost for routine maintenance, it might not be so much the amount of maintenance being done, but when and who is doing the maintenance. Again analyze the work to find the root problem. Sending a handyman to do one item at a time will cost more than sending him to do a group of items; this will maximize the amount of work done per hour. Matching the appropriate worker or vender to the job is as important as getting the job done. As an example; sending the handyman to clear a main line drain stoppage may be more costly than sending an experienced plumber. On the other hand sending an expensive plumber to replace a leaky faucet or broken garbage disposal may be costlier than sending a handyman to complete the job.

Setting up a yearly budget for both routine maintenance and capital improvements will help balance your cash flow. Nothing is less fun than finding out you need to replace a one hundred gallon water heater in the same month you pay your property taxes. Both routine and preventive maintenance would have alerted you of a potential problem. The water heater replacement could have been budgeted and replaced before it blew out. Below is quick list of procedures to help cut your maintenance costs:

- 1: Routine Maintenance: Inspect all units including exterior grounds, water heaters, drains, and plumbing fixtures. List and schedule any deficiencies. Budget a dollar amount for each repair.
- 2: Vendors: Review all current vendors and their price lists before you need them. Compare and shop different vendors to get the best price.
- 3: Emergencies: Set up an emergency vender list with prices and check prices every six months to stay current.
- 4: Capital Expenses: Big ticket items such as: roofing, exterior painting, water heaters, re-piping etc. Identify these expenses while doing the routine inspections. Get quotes for all the items you wish to repair or replace in the coming year. Budget funds and date for work.

Dear Maintenance Men:

I have just purchased an apartment property with a swimming pool. The pool is in very poor condition and I am debating filling it in and putting in grass over the top. What is the procedure for filling in a pool?

Rena

Dear Rena:

In our opinion a **filled in** apartment swimming pool is a **good** apartment swimming pool and an excellent use of dirt! First, before filling in a pool, check with your city or county, permits and procedures may differ. Drain all of the water out of the pool, skimmer and main bottom drain. Pour concrete into the skimmer, main bottom drain and into any pipes leading into the pool. This will stop any water or creatures from using the pipes as a runway into the pool equipment area. If your pool is surrounded by concrete, try to save the water fill line into the pool, it can be used as a future sprinkler water line. Using a jackhammer, poke a few holes in the bottom of the pool to help in drainage. These holes should be at least twelve inches wide and all the way through the pool bottom. Keep in mind the pool bottom can be a foot thick or more. Leave all the jackhammer debris in the bottom of the pool; it will help in future drainage. If your coping around the pool is in good condition, you can leave it, but we recommend that it be removed. The coping can easily be detached by sledge or jackhammer. Just let the coping fall into the pool it will also help in drainage. One half to three quarters of the back fill material should be sand or gravel at the bottom of the pool. The balance of the fill should be clean dirt and topsoil level with the existing grade. Water the dirt as you back fill the pool to help in compressing the soil. The topsoil should be pack down with a tamper. Water the soil regularly for about a week, filling in any low spots. Seed or landscape as you wish after the soil has stabilized. Lastly, contact your insurance company and tell them the good news about your newly filled in pool, your rates might just come down a little.

Maintenance Joke: Q: What happened to the maintenance man who didn't know the difference between putty and toothpaste?

A: All of his windows fell out. (Ba Da Boom!)

*Jerry L'Ecuyer is the owner of **JLE Property Management & Buffalo Maintenance, Inc.** and is a licensed contractor & real estate broker. He is currently on the Board of Directors and Chairman of the Education Committee for the **Apartment Association of Orange County**. Jerry has been involved with apartments as a professional since 1988 and can be reached at (714) 778-0480 or jerry@JLE1.com. Frank Alvarez is the Operations Director for **Buffalo Maintenance, Inc.** He has been involved with apartment maintenance for over 14 years. Frank can be reached at (714) 956-8371 or visit the office at, 202 E. Broadway in Anaheim, CA 92805. Please view our web sites at: www.JLE1.COM & www.BuffaloMaintenance.com*