

Retail CONSTRUCTION MAGAZINE

FACILITY MAINTENANCE

The design phase must not only consider the proposed layout of the store fixtures but also the potential for new floor arrangements.

By Ed Saiberlich

Think maintenance during design for long-term operations savings

Retail construction presents unique challenges. Not only do stores or restaurants have to be attractive and functional, they must also be efficient for store personnel and easy to maintain so that they present a crisp, clean, selling environment. Since most chain retail facilities do not have full-time on-site maintenance personnel, maintenance must be considered in the construction planning process. By factoring in the cost, skill level and proposed contract support before construction begins, retailers and restaurateurs can significantly reduce maintenance and cleaning costs for the life of the facility and, in fact, extend the store's useable life.

Certainly one of the major factors to consider in the planning stage is whether maintenance will be handled by in-house

staff or through a facilities service contractor. If in-house staff is used, what is their skill level and availability in the event of an emergency? If an outside service firm will be used, what does the contract cover and what are their emergency response capabilities? In addition, for major mechanical systems, equipment warranties and service contracts should be well-understood and factored into the projected maintenance costs.

The result of this exercise should be a reasonably accurate projection of maintenance costs extending years into the future.

Each major construction component has a maintenance factor that must be considered during the design/build phase. Here are design considerations for each of the major systems/functions for retail establishments:

■ **Mechanical systems:** Mechanical systems in

larger malls are often the responsibility of the property owner. However, for some smaller malls and freestanding stores and restaurants, the mechanical systems, including HVAC, elevators and refrigeration units, are part of the tenant build-out. Most rooftop HVAC units are built for long life. However, a routine quarterly preventive maintenance program, either by the equipment manufacturer or a qualified service provider, should be followed that includes a visual inspection, the replacement of filters and inspection/replacement of belts. Condensation drains should also be inspected.

Units installed inside the store above the dropped ceiling should be avoided since maintenance and repair access is generally through the store's ceiling tiles, which is very disruptive to the selling space.

■ **Electrical and**

Lighting: In the case of electrical service, it is less about maintenance and more about availability. Special consideration should be given to potential future expansions. Conduits should be over-specified in order to accommodate future installations of electrical service, phone lines, fiber optic cable and other communications. Inadequate conduits are often a problem when working on remodeling projects. Also, the design phase must not only consider the proposed layout of the store fixtures but also the potential for new floor arrangements. It is important to try to anticipate all of the floor outlets that will be required in the future and install them at the outset. It is much easier and less costly to install floor outlets before the buildout is finished and the floor coverings are installed.

Regularly scheduled relamping programs are important, especially for specialty lighting and fixtures that are in hard to reach locations.

■ **Plumbing:** Plumbing is generally not a major consideration for retail spaces; however, it is critical in restaurants. It's important that all drains and cleanouts be regularly maintained. It's also important that cleanouts be located in easily accessible locations away from public areas and that they do not require the removal of flooring or other finished surfaces.

■ **Floor and wall coverings:** There are many excellent, durable, easy-to-maintain floor and wall coverings available. It makes sense to invest up front for the best in quarry or ceramic tiles and carpeting. For general retail space, the best floor covering is determined by

both the function of the space and traffic patterns. Generally tile is used in the main traffic areas and carpeting works best for the departments.

Restaurants again have special considerations. The bottom line for the food preparation areas is to have durable, easily maintained surfaces with plenty of drainage.

Cleaning should be considered through the entire construction process, as well as when the store is fitted with fixtures. The high traffic tile floors should be relatively free of fixtures and obstructions so cleaning is easy and efficient. For other areas, it helps to have fixtures on wheels so they can be periodically moved for cleaning.

■ **Remodeling:** Remodeling presents opportunities that are not available when first designing and building a retail space.

The store employees and maintenance staff know what works and what doesn't work. So, when remodeling, talk with employees. They live in the space and they hear customer comments about how the selling space is working. They know when they have to search for an outlet to light a fixture and they know if mechanical systems are noisy or unreliable.

Any retail construction project is a major undertaking but you should look at it as the first of a continuum of operating costs. Attention to design at the outset can save considerable time and expense over the life of the asset. **R**

Ed Saiberlich is Midwest regional operations director for UNICCO Service Co. He oversees the company's custodial, maintenance and repair services for retail facilities throughout the Midwest.

The logo for UNICCO features the word "UNICCO" in a bold, sans-serif font. The letter "U" is a light grey color, while the letters "N", "I", "C", "C", and "O" are a dark brown color. The final "O" is a solid dark brown circle with a small red dot in its center.

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