



COLD COMFORT

BY AMY DREW THOMPSON

BLACK FRIDAY AND white snow will be upon your stores before you know it. Do you have a plan in effect to keep pipes (and customers) from freezing when winter rears its chilly, unforgiving head?

PIPE DREAMS

Part of a manager's to-do list includes plans for winterization, ensuring customer and employee safety and maximum energy efficiency. Even dark stores need prep to survive Old Man Winter's wrath. Smart managers get their ducks in a row well before those first snowflakes begin to fall.

Come winter, one of the primary concerns is a building's ductwork.

Robert G. Caputo, EVP, Sales and Marketing, for Phoenix-based Telgian Corporation, experts in fire protection and safety, suggested weekly maintenance on dry-pipe systems, especially areas subject



Robert G. Caputo

occurs within these systems because the compressor pumps hot air into the cold pipe, and there are drains for the condensation."

to freezing, such as entry vestibules and loading docks.

"In these systems," he explained, "there is compressed air keeping the valve closed instead of water....

Condensation

Problems occur when a lack of maintenance allows water drainage to build up in the condensation nipples. "Proper maintenance means periodic draining, especially prior to cold weather and the longer cold-weather period," he said.

"When a fire sprinkler system breaks, it can be very costly – not so much in terms of repairing the sprinkler system, but due to the damage and loss of merchandise and the interruption of business – it's never something that happens during store hours," he added. "It always happens at 2 a.m."

Some states enforce quarterly inspections, but Caputo recommends all fire sprinkler systems get annual inspections by a qualified technician, contractor or inspection service provider. "Beyond that, he or she should be training the folks who work in the facility so they can perform inspections at regular intervals."

FEAR OF THE DARK

"Dark stores are a high expense," said Rob Almond, CEO of NEST, a multi-facility management firm specializing in consulting and technology solutions for retailers. "The property is just sitting there. It's not producing any revenue, and they have to ensure it's not going to cost more down the road due to a lack of winterization."



Rob Almond

The biggest culprit NEST sees is frozen pipes. "They crack and break, yes, but these are dark properties. No one is even going to discover the damage in the morning as they might in an active location. You might not know the site has flooded for weeks or months. Then the weather gets warm. The temperature rises and the water sits and mold forms – and you have another headache."

Facility managers should provide retailers a survey. "Something to confirm they've checked everything: HVAC, electrical, all the things you spec out. Take some photos, too. If something goes wrong, you want to have documentation that proves the condition of the building in the event an insurance company get involved."

Almond recommended retailers looking to cut costs leave preventative maintenance in their budgets. "If I could come up with a winterizing tag line, it would be, 'Don't cut out a few dollars and risk a whole lot more.'"

ACTIVITY = LIABILITY

Rite Aid's pharmacies put life-saving and life-sustaining drugs and merchandise into the hands of its customers. So, staying open throughout the cold-weather season is of utmost importance.

"Being able to receive deliveries and open on time for associates to work and customers to shop is among the biggest concerns," said Karen Shriner, Esq., Director, Retail Facilities.

Snow concerns loom large. "The corporate office typically hires a contractor who sets up the pricing and service schedule for snow plowing and salting. The industry standard is that a plow will come out for two inches of accumulation and also de-ice the walkways as pre-authorized in the contract," she said.

"Part of the season preparation should also include a site visit, where the contractor walks the site with the store manager and stakes out the curb lines and unique service areas to prevent damage during service. The plow professional and the store manager should also agree on a location for snow pile-up. This is extremely important because not every snowfall just melts away in a few days and by the end of the season you can have an eight-foot-high tower of snow blocking vehicle parking areas and visibility." ●

Amy Drew Thompson is a writer based in Florida.

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