

Letter to the Editor

Best systems, people needed for maintenance management

The recent outcry by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi over Malaysia's poorly maintained public buildings and facilities that have resulted in high repair costs clearly points to the need for more professional and efficient approaches to be adopted in our country's maintenance practices.

As a facilities management service provider in the country for the past 20 years, we at Cofreth also feel there is an urgent need for the Government and private institutions to re-look at the various facets of facilities management to ensure its effectiveness.

A Preventive Maintenance (PM) programme could help avoid unscheduled down-time and the occurrence of frequent equipment breakdowns.

Among the solutions to increase equipment reliability and lifespan are condition-monitoring techniques and maintenance care through the use of a detailed asset list, exhaustive PM checklist and written procedures.

Many Malaysian companies are still employing a fire-fighting

approach when it comes to maintenance, carrying it out only when necessary without realising that maintenance departments are becoming major cost centres within organisations. But even if they implement a PM programme, how effective are the methods used?

One of the more important aspects of maintenance is the technically complex PM method of measuring facilities and equipment against in-depth control parameters, so that telltale signs of a problem can be spotted.

Today, e-maintenance software such as i-SCADA (the Internet-based Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) are changing the landscape of PM practices by integrating an Internet gateway that enables real-time monitoring, controlling and reporting of equipment parameters, data and performance indicators.

This technology also allows authorised users to log onto the Internet to obtain information, change equipment settings and even trigger alerts on equipment failures and availability via e-mail and Short-text Messaging Service (SMS). This provides faster

response to problems and undoubtedly, prevents problems from becoming more serious and costly.

However, an effective PM programme has to work hand-in-glove with a well-planned Predictive Maintenance (PdM) programme.

The effective use of good forecasting tools such as Infrared Thermography, ultrasonics and vibration analysis are essential to prolong the operational life of a given equipment configuration as they can identify problems before they become catastrophic.

Another important practice is to use Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure equipment downtime, response time and cost of critical equipment, as this will reflect the actual value of a PM programme and employee activity.

Furthermore, maintenance departments should also benchmark their performance with other similar operations so a standard for maintenance practices can be set for comparison.

However, even with all the best tools and systems in place, it

would be impossible to implement best practices without the right people. This is where outsourcing to specialist serviced providers should be considered as they can provide more holistic maintenance strategies and world-class practices in line with the

Government's hopes of elevating Malaysian maintenance standards and culture.

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