LeanSite

ONE-PAGE COMPARISON · FACILITIES

# Reactive vs Preventive Maintenance

Reactive maintenance fixes equipment after it fails. Preventive maintenance services it on a schedule before it fails. Most facilities need both, matched to each asset's risk.

## The four terms people mix up

### Reactive

A strategy: wait for something to fail, then respond.

*Calling HVAC service after a rooftop unit stops cooling.*

### Corrective

The repair work itself, after a failure or after an inspection finds a problem.

*Replacing a worn belt found during a quarterly inspection.*

### Preventive

Planned work on a schedule set by time, usage, season or a code requirement.

*Changing air filters monthly; testing emergency lights monthly and yearly.*

### Proactive

Finding and fixing the root causes of repeat failures so they stop happening.

*Changing a filter type after repeated coil icing.*

## Side by side

| Factor | Reactive | Preventive |
|---|---|---|
| **Trigger** | Failure, complaint, alarm or emergency | Calendar, meter reading, season or checklist |
| **Cost pattern** | Unpredictable repair spend; rush and after-hours rates | Budgeted labor and parts |
| **Downtime** | Usually unplanned | Usually scheduled at a convenient time |
| **Staffing** | Interrupt-driven dispatch | Planned routes and workloads |
| **Vendors** | Emergency calls | Scheduled service windows |
| **Asset life** | Failures can stress connected parts | Regular care reduces wear |
| **Records** | Often incomplete when work is rushed | Repeatable task records for audits and budgets |
| **Best for** | Low-cost, low-risk items that are quick to replace | Safety, compliance, revenue-critical and costly assets |

## What the data says

**12% to 18%**
estimated savings from preventive over reactive maintenance

**More than 55%**
of maintenance resources in an average facility are still reactive (31% preventive, 12% predictive, 2% other)



**8% to 12%**
further savings from predictive over preventive maintenance

Source: U.S. Department of Energy, FEMP Operations and Maintenance Best Practices guide.

⚠ **Myth check.** The claim that reactive maintenance costs "3 to 5 times more" is widely credited to the Department of Energy, but Reliability Magazine found it in none of the three editions of the DOE guide (2002, 2004 and 2010). Use the DOE's 12% to 18% figure instead.

## Preventive or run to failure? Four questions per asset

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Is it a life-safety system, or does a code, insurer or lease require maintenance records? | Yes: preventive (required) |
| 2 | Would a failure stop operations or revenue, or affect many people? | Yes: preventive |
| 3 | Is repair or replacement expensive, or are parts slow to get? | Yes: preventive |
| 4 | Could the failure damage other equipment or the building? | Yes: preventive |
| ✓ | **No to all four** | Run to failure: fix it when it breaks, keep spares |

**Score your own assets with the free LeanSite Asset Risk Scorecard at getleansite.com.** Sources: U.S. DOE FEMP Operations and Maintenance Best Practices guide; Reliability Magazine, "Reactive Maintenance Costs 3 to 5x More: Tracing the DOE Claim"; NFPA 101 section 7.9.3 for emergency lighting tests. Educational comparison from LeanSite. Updated October 2026. Code, insurer and manufacturer requirements always come first.

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