



How to Speak Maintenance

Everyone in multifamily should learn to speak maintenance!

Article 1 | HVAC Readiness

For any business or organization, having transparency, clear communication and thorough processes ensure that things run optimally and efficiently. This is especially true for the office staff and maintenance teams who oversee properties. While their roles are different, when the office has a basic knowledge of maintenance and how to better communicate with the maintenance team, efficiency and processes improve.

HVAC is a common maintenance need and one of the biggest areas where a more knowledgeable office team would be helpful. While it can seem complex and difficult to understand, how the HVAC systems operate can be simple once broken down to the components.

HVAC issues, simplified

The two main components in an HVAC system are the air handler, which is located indoors and moves air through the apartment, and the condensing unit, which is located outdoors and removes heat.

Typically, when residents have issues with their HVAC units, it's because of:

- ⊗ Furniture blocking the return duct vents
- ⊗ Clogged coils in the evaporator or condenser
- ⊗ Clogged filters
- ⊗ Brush surrounding the condenser unit

To help minimize these common issues, there are a handful of things the office team can do to troubleshoot before submitting a maintenance ticket. For example, ask:

- If the filter has been changed recently
- If anything is obstructing the return duct vent
- If the unit has been turned on.

Office teams should also keep an eye out for issues when moving around the property, such as brush that is overgrown around the outdoor condenser unit.

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Preventive maintenance tips

For maintenance teams, incorporating preventive maintenance programs can help maximize resident comfort, while also saving time and money. A few main components of a preventive maintenance (PM) program can include:

- ⊗ Executing HVAC maintenance and reviews in the spring before the heat of the summer
- ⊗ Cleaning coils and condensation pans and drains
- ⊗ Changing filters and encouraging employees to change them monthly
- ⊗ Educating lawn crews not to do any mowing or weed-eating near the condenser units
- ⊗ Notifying residents of heat advisories and how to reduce unnecessary heat production

Through a basic understanding of HVAC systems and their common issues, office staff can speak to residents about their issues and possibly identify a solution, reducing unnecessary service requests and improving the resident experience.

Key Takeaways:

- Have a proactive versus reactive approach to identifying and tackling maintenance-related issues with a strong PM program. This can help reduce overtime, increase employee morale and drive down expenses.
- Aim to do the work on “your time,” as opposed to late at night or on the weekend when an issue arises.
- All employees, from office staff to maintenance teams, should keep their eyes open for potential concerns.
- Because air movement is key to a properly functioning HVAC unit, make sure nothing is obstructing the flow of air from the return duct vent (indoors) or the condensing unit (outdoors).
- Regularly change HVAC filters and educate residents on how to keep their units operating optimally, such as not shutting the unit off completely during the summer months or using window coverings.

“How to Speak Maintenance” is a monthly series that focuses on teaching property managers and office staff how to better understand and appreciate the work and the value of the maintenance teams, eliminate conflict points that come up, and provide better customer service for our residents.

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