
V N E W S O F V A L U E

PREVENT WATER DAMAGE (AND SAVE MONEY)

We would never want to have to try to get along without water, but sometimes you can have too much of a good thing. When fan coils (convectors) on air conditioning units overflow, water damage to community association common areas and individual units can be substantial, and the expense to clean up the mess can also be exorbitant. In one property, water damage repairs were budgeted at \$50,000 annually, solely as a result of fan coil overflows. This doesn't have to happen—steps can be taken to prevent water damage from happening in the first place. Ken Boysworth, operations manager with the Department of State's WASHMAC program, which provides contract services to U.S. embassies, has 20 years of experience managing commercial, government, and residential properties. He offers the following advice to remedy these annoying and expensive fan coil problems.

What's The First Step? The first step in preventive maintenance is to inspect the lowest (bottom of the building) convector condensation pipes to ensure that horizontal drainage has the proper grade to allow for a smooth water flow, rather than backing up into the lower apartments. While inspecting the horizontal pipes, do a quick check for clean out access, sometimes referred to in plumbing language as an "inspection with a removable cap/plug." This permits access to flush the drain lines on a scheduled basis.

How Do We Inspect The Fan Coil Unit? To provide proper preventive maintenance of a fan coil unit or convector, clear the immediate areas surrounding the unit and place a protective drop cloth so that flooring is not damaged. Remove the filter; then remove the condensate pan and fan housing and brush the condensate pan to remove any loose articles (or reveal any unseen defects) and vacuum the pan clean. Next, vacuum the fan housing to eliminate any dust and apply oil to the fan motors. Reinstall the fan housing/condensate pan, install a new filter, and connect the pipe connections. Using a small power snake, snake the line from the fan coil/convector to the main line three times. After snaking, clean the coil and flush it with a gallon of water to ensure a good rinse and good drainage. The final step is to install a biocide device to eliminate algae and prevent fouling of the water pipes and condensate pans. The preferred product has the lowest harmful manufacturers safety data sheets (MSDS) rating: pan guard regulator strips.

When Should We Perform Preventive Maintenance? Oftentimes, this is the most misunderstood concept to grasp. The proper time to perform preventive maintenance is from October through April. During the fall, winter, and early spring, the fan coils are not condensing. This provides an excellent time to snake and flush the lower horizontal pipes prior to cleaning the fan coil units. In fact, snaking the lower horizontal and the vertical riser pipes for six feet upwards will ensure a clean and unobstructed path to allow for water flow. It is best to begin the cooling season with clear pipes.

How Often Should We Snake And Flush The Lower Horizontal Pipes? Lower horizontal pipes should be snaked and flushed prior to cleaning the fan coil units, after the complete cleaning of the building, and one time during the summer months (if your budget permits it).

Questions Or Concerns? If you need some answers, please call Steve Dickerson at Morgan & Cheves (703-739-2346).

October 1998