

# How to Reduce Unplanned Downtime with Effective Maintenance and Repairs

Whether it's the result of a jammed line, a generator going down, or a key piece of machinery failing, unplanned downtime can be crippling to your operation.

When processes stop unexpectedly, it can lead to hours of productivity drops and hundreds of thousands of dollars being lost. Unplanned downtime, whatever the cause, can have a significant impact on your business.

It's how you react to unplanned downtime that can dictate how much of an effect it has. In this piece, we explore some top tips for minimizing the effect of things breaking down when you least expect it and how to reduce unplanned downtime.

## EMPLOY A STRICT MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE

Planned maintenance strategies are far more effective at reducing downtime than reactive outlooks. Failures do happen, but an effective strategy centers around not simply accepting these as inevitable.

If you can fix a problem before it ever happens, it can save both time and money. Being preventative in your approach to maintenance can also help reduce the cost of reactively having to repair a failed piece of equipment.

Utilizing data, whether that's from sensors that show the likely lifespan of components, or historic data that indicates the likely failure date, allows you to be more proactive.

Your maintenance plan should include:

- Inspecting equipment and machinery regularly for wear and tear.
- Following recommended maintenance schedules for specific pieces of machinery.
- Cleaning, making oil changes, and carrying out minor repairs regularly.
- Keeping accurate records of previous maintenance and services to allow you to spot trends.

When you detect any issues within the process, you can easily factor in the time and costs to ensure you know how your business will be impacted by downtime.

## ADDRESS CHRONIC FAILURES

The industry average for causes of unexpected downtime is split between chronic failures (70%) and sporadic failures (30%). Many organizations accept chronic failures, such as minor leaks, component breaks, and wear, learning to live with them as part of their operation. This is often because they don't see these

happenings as being as catastrophic as serious sporadic events, accepting them as normal. Companies that don't accept chronic failures as normal and eliminate or reduce them with preventative measures are the ones working towards world class manufacturing.

However, some common chronic failures don't need to happen at all. By tackling these more effectively, you can reduce their impact and extend the time between failures, or even eliminate them. Doing so can reduce unplanned downtime occurrences. Some of the most common chronic causes include:

- Hydraulic, gasket, and air leaks in pipes
- Threaded fasteners loosening due to vibration
- Shaft misalignment
- Key wear, slack, and spun bearings
- General wear and tear

## HAVING THE RIGHT MATERIALS IN STOCK

Preparation is key when it comes to reducing the impact of malfunctions and breakdowns. But it's not enough to simply know when to expect something to break. That can even be impossible to predict.

Having the right products, parts, and tools close by can allow you to react as quickly as possible. So even if you can't completely remove unplanned downtime, you can at least dampen its overall impact.

This eliminates the time you spend sourcing replacement parts and products, which can extend downtime. Store any replacement parts, tools and materials used for common repairs in a defined area, not far from your key machinery. This enables those with maintenance and repair responsibilities to reach them quickly and easily.

Multi-purpose tools you should always have available for fast, temporary fixes include:

- Threadlockers and industrial adhesives to fix loosening issues.

- Gasketing solutions, oils, and lubricants to get parts moving properly again.
- Sealants that can quickly stop any fluid, air, or gas leaks.
- Retaining compounds so you can address key wear, bearing slipping, and overheating issues.

It can also be a good idea to have a temporary repair policy in place, alongside your regular maintenance schedule. This outlines what types of temporary fixes can be made, the materials to use, and who can carry them out.

## **APPOINT A MAINTENANCE CHAMPION**

Ensure your plant follows a maintenance schedule effectively by making sure someone specific is responsible for it.

Create a maintenance schedule for planned downtime and ensure your operators and other employees adhere to it by building it into certain roles. Make it part of their job to ensure this plan is followed, that teams carry out inspections at the right frequency and intensity, and that the impact of downtime is monitored and tracked.

## **ENSURE EFFECTIVE MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT TRAINING**

Human error is the most common cause of unplanned downtime in the manufacturing industry, responsible for 23% of instances. That's far higher than most other sectors, where it can cause as little as 9% of downtime.

To avoid this, arrange proper maintenance and repair training for your frontline employees and operators. This can ensure:

- They carry out general jobs and operations safely and effectively.
- Cleaning, inspections, and temporary fixes are administered properly.
- Records of usage are accurate to carry out maintenance and replacement in a preventative manner.
- Bad practices are eliminated early on to prevent them from spreading.

Reduce unplanned downtime in manufacturing for improved performance, profits, and processes.

