



BEST PRACTICES

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Irrigation techs should shower profits

More and more companies have been hiring irrigation technicians to maintain and repair irrigation on their maintenance jobs. I think this is a great opportunity to capture additional revenue from existing clients. However, there is also tremendous potential for this practice to add to your costs if not managed intensely.

Where do companies go wrong? For some, the issue is their maintenance foremen or supervisors, who in the past performed minor repairs or troubleshooting, now call on their irrigation technician co-workers to handle all of that. So they're increasing costs with your irrigation techs making separate trips to sites, and these more-expensive staffers often are spending time on non-billable services.

Non-billable time is its own beast. If there are no billable repairs to do, a technician might be sent to do system checks. Sure, he (or she) is "busy," — but not generating revenue and instead is charging time to jobs. If there are job requirements for system checks on a large site, it's probably effective to have a technician do the work. However, on small sites I would question the effectiveness of this versus having a foreman do the checks.

Smart strategies

Here are five simple solutions to avoid these potential pitfalls:

1. Assign someone to manage — not just schedule — your irrigation technician(s). Create a tracking system to capture billable time versus non-billable

time. Let the techs know there are expectations for a certain amount of billable hours each week.

2. Spread the repair-work wealth. Train and equip your foremen and supervisors to do the basics and have them do minor repairs.

3. Create forms that make billing from the field easy. Some companies use parts sheets with photographs, where the technicians can place quantities next to the photos instead of having to write product descriptions. Most field personnel dread cumbersome paperwork, sometimes causing you to miss billing opportunities.

4. Keep technicians busy with profitable tasks. If there is no profitable irrigation work to be done that day, re-assign your irrigation techs so they're doing something else that's productive and revenue-generating, such as supplementing enhancement crews.

5. Implement checks and balances. Whoever manages the technicians must know the contract requirements relative to what is billable and non-billable, and make sure client authorization for repairs are received before work is done.

Billing and tracking

There are a host of other things I have seen companies do to help streamline irrigation billing and tracking parts use.

Some companies simply bill for parts without specific descriptions. For example, they bill for 7.5-in. fittings at \$1 apiece rather than listing each individual 0.5-in. coupling, tee and 90° ell. They might bill for an assembly for a valve, including associated fittings rather than itemizing them.

Some companies charge for labor and parts with no itemization. For some customers that's OK, especially for small billing amounts.

Making paperwork easier to do usually contributes to getting it done in a more timely and complete manner. Developing systems to better manage and utilize your irrigation technicians can contribute significantly to your bottom line.

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