Leak Detection Specialists: A Construction Industry Must

By Dick Rennick

The completion of a 150-tract residential job was in limbo when inspectors would not pass the project due to low pressure in water lines. Plumbers and engineers were perplexed in their search for the source. The cause? A leaking crushed water line caused by heavy equipment. The contractor was in the process of digging up the whole area to locate the leak when American Leak Detection of Palm Springs, Calif., was summoned.

One hour later, the break was located without any digging and the problem resolved. Using high-tech electronics proved to be the easiest and most cost-effective way to resolve this tough problem. Further inspection within several of these new homes revealed pinpoint leaks in copper lines as well. Regardless of whether the leaks ate gaseous or liquid, hidden in walls or spilling underground in pneumatic tubing systems or in-ground swimming pools, leaks can sink a project.

In Northern California, a fast food restaurant in a shopping center started a remodeling project for an addition. The construction contractors looked at original plans to find the location of the pipes. Ready to go, and using the as-builts as their guides, the contractors tore up half the floors in the restaurant, looking for pipes that weren’t there—they were clear across the building. Had leak detection specialists been called in initially, the damage could have been avoided. The specialists located the pipes within hours.

Answer This First

Before tackling remodeling projects, whether commercial, industrial or residential, contractors these days need to ask themselves several questions about prevention, maintenance and quality control:

- Where are the drainage systems located; are they in the foundation, slabs or walls?
- Are the pipes large enough to support the new construction?
- Is there easy accessibility to the old pipes in the new structure, and can the old pipes be used in conjunction with the new ones?

And the ultimate question, according to American Leak Detection: Are there leaks in any of the pipes? To pinpoint the source and location of leaks, leak specialists can use ultrasonics sonics or radio waves to determine pipe locations before floors are torn up in remodeling projects, or to determine if pipes in new projects are holding the requisite amount of pressure in new projects.

Concern not only in the construction industry but also by environmental proponents about leaks—escaping liquid or gas—and the enormous damage they can do, has spawned
the growth in the leak detection industry.

What’s That Smell?

Leak detection also comes in handy years after a project is completed. A major disaster in a shopping mall in Las Vegas, Nev., was a year-and-a-half and tens of thousands of dollars in the making before a leak problem was solved by a specialist.

A 160,000-square-foot shopping center/strip mall with major Mailers as anchors was plagued in all its stones by a constant sewage smell. For months, various contractors, consultants and engineers were called in to rid the place of odor—to no avail.

An American Leak Detection team was on the job by 8 a.m. They found leaks in several broken and crushed above-the-ground vent pipes in some walls, and the odor was eliminated when the pipes were fixed and vented properly. By noon the problem was solved.

One in every 300 buildings has a leak in either the water, waste, drain or sewer pipes, according to an industry source. But leak detection does not have to be an emergency service. It should be a preventive maintenance service or a quality control service.

Using a checklist on water conservation and leak detection, contractor or homeowners can determine if they have a leak in 15 minutes. On the checklist are things like monitoring the water level in a pool, determining if a musty odor is coming from a toilet bowl, or comparing monthly water bills. If the initial analysis signals a problem, it’s probably time to call in a leak detection specialist.

About the Author

Dick Rennick is president of American Leak Detection, a Palm Springs, Calif., company with over 190 franchises specializing in leak detection.