
Defense Report

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Postponing Repairs to Army Facilities —Really a False Economy

It is no secret that the standard maintenance and repair of Army buildings and facilities come out of the far end of the budget pipeline. So when the dollars run out, the upkeep of barracks, warehouses and other buildings and their attendant utilities are forcibly delayed, frequently to the point where the eventual cost of repair becomes prohibitive. It's often a case of pay now or pay much more later.

The Army faces a serious dilemma in coping with the maintenance demands of its vast real estate holdings. Much of it is old and suffering from severe deterioration. Consequently, the total value of needed repairs, including family housing, will be about \$2.7 billion by the end of 1984. And everything left on the shelf will undoubtedly increase in cost over time because of inflation and continuing deterioration.

Unfortunately, the penalties for delaying or deferring needed repairs to installations, depots, arsenals, reserve armories and family housing extend beyond the financial liability incurred. When soldiers and their families are relegated to living and working in slum-like quarters with inoperative utilities, cracked plaster, or leaky roofs, they tend to be less productive on the job and can hardly be blamed if they decide to seek careers outside the Army. They expect and deserve better.

From a practical business perspective, such massive delayed maintenance is also a very poor way to manage this costly capital investment. Neglect leads to continuing deterioration, eventually demanding more expensive repairs or possible complete replacement. Yet, as long as facility maintenance continues to take a back seat when the tough, real-life budget decisions are made, this tremendous reservoir of unperformed maintenance will continue to plague the Army and the lives of its people.

It is unfortunate that the Army's diminishing share of the budget forces its planners to make these difficult decisions. If the Army is ever to gain control of this huge backlog of maintenance, it will have to "bite the bullet," program the funds and stand firm on reductions. It's going to take lots of money, but it must be done to prevent the Army's physical plant from falling apart.