5 TIPS FOR DOOR REPLACEMENT

What to consider before replacing your hydraulic or bi-fold door

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Repairs and updates to equipment are simply unavoidable. Small adjustments and fixes are to be expected, but at some point, the best solution might be purchasing new equipment.

The question whether to replace or repair bi-fold and hydraulic doors requires the same considerations as for all other equipment. Purchasing a new door may be the best option, but there's a lot to consider before investing in a brand-new door.

Reasons to replace an oversized door include more than just the obvious fact that the door is non-working. A building owner may decide to replace a door with a larger one to accommodate the growing size of its machinery. Or they may be looking for a cosmetic update to increase the value of the building. Regardless of the reason, there are five key points to consider before replacing a door:

1) Repair vs. replace
2) Safety features
3) Building capacity
4) Style and technology
5) Importance of consulting a professional

1 Repair vs. replace

High-quality doors typically last up to 20 years. However, necessary maintenance and repairs become more common as doors age. The frequency with which a door opens and closes can cause parts to deteriorate faster. Plus, common parts such as door seals and mechanical components always require regular repairs or replacement.

Examining the seals and weatherstrips of a door can help you find indicators of wear and damage. Watch for cracks, tears, or broken pieces on the door's seals. Without properly functioning seals, buildings can leak heat and air conditioning and may cause owners increased energy costs. A simple seal or weatherstrip repair, which usually costs less than $100, often results in annual cost savings.

An inconsistent or non-functioning lifting operator may justify door replacement. A cost-saving and effective solution that many manufacturers offer is replacing the motor instead of replacing the entire door. This is an option if the door frame is structurally sound.

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Overall, if a door's problems are costing $250 to $500 in repairs every six months, consider replacing the door and operating system. Other factors, such as safety issues, may also warrant door replacement.

◀ Proper sealing is essential to avoid increased energy costs. An effective seal should be free of cracks, tears, or broken pieces.

2 Safety features

Improperly functioning overhead doors present life-threatening risks. If a 2,000-pound door malfunctions and gravity takes over, any equipment or people in the way are in danger. Most overhead door manufacturers have incorporated a built-in safety element to help prevent such accidents, but older models may not have this safety feature.

Safety sensors aren't new technology, but not all doors feature them. Choose a door with photo-eyes or safety-sensing edges that will recognize if an obstruction is in the path of the door as it closes.

Photo-eyes transmit a beam a few inches from the floor. If something breaks the beam, the door recognizes it and stops. Similarly, sensing edges attach to the bottom of the doorframe and cause the door to stop if an obstruction meets them.

Another tip is to always disengage all manual latches to avoid safety and maintenance issues. Trying to open a locked door can be dangerous and cause damage. Unless a door has an automatic latch, a single-latch handle needs to be manually released prior to opening the door. Look for a single-latch handle that incorporates a safety switch to prevent the door from starting until it's unlocked.

Some manufacturers also offer optional top override switches, which serve as backup safety switches if the limit switch in the control box fails. When contact is made with the override switch, it stops the door from traveling past its opening height.

Last, check to see if the manufacturer has a high safety rating. Before ordering a door, confirm that it has the necessary safety features. Save on costly replacements and prevent potential injuries by confirming safety sensors, safety switches, and the safety rating.

3 Building capacity

An oversized door should only be paired with a sturdy frame. In fact, it's nearly impossible to mount a new bi-fold or hydraulic door without the proper frame. If an existing structure is damaged or the steel is rusted, the frame may be repairable. If not, the manufacturer or contractor will need to fit and install a new doorframe with the new door.

Besides the frame, the building should be inspected to ensure it can handle the weight of a large door. A good manufacturer will inspect the structure from the jamb and steel header to the foundation. The manufacturer and contractor will work closely to ensure the building is braced properly to handle the loads of the door.

The structure of a building often determines whether a bi-fold door or a hydraulic door is the best option. Each type applies different amounts of weight to the building, and the placement of the door makes a difference as well.

A hydraulic door is often a better solution for structures with side openings. Bi-fold doors, on the other hand, are not ideal for side wall installations because they are mounted above the opening. There is not typically enough room to stay below the roofline.

▲ Doors can be designed with a variety of glass, wood, and siding materials to create a custom look.

4 Style and technology

Bi-fold and hydraulic doors each offer characteristics that make them attractive options for different applications. For example, bi-fold doors raise upward instead of outward, requiring less operating space in front of the building.

Hydraulic doors open faster, providing an ideal solution for a heat-controlled building. In fact, hydraulic doors open up to 25% faster than other large doors.

Doors can be custom designed to fit nearly any aesthetic requirements. From glass, wood, and siding to a combination of materials, the possibilities are endless. This allows contractors to install a door that blends with the existing exterior and looks aesthetically pleasing.

When choosing a bi-fold door, look for solid-welded construction rather than bolt-together designs. Solid-welded doors offer a strong frame design that minimizes the likelihood of parts loosening over time, meaning almost no maintenance is required.

Similarly, when choosing a hydraulic door, select one with all-steel construction rather than a combination of wood and steel. A door built with heavy-gauge steel tubing and a robust truss system delivers strength and durability.

Besides safety features like sensors and switches, there are a number of maintenance-friendly options and modern conveniences available. Choose from override systems, high wind-load ratings, insulation and door liners, walk-through doors, and windows.

5 Consulting a professional

When you consider all of these factors, you'll see that working with the right manufacturer can make all the difference. Select a knowledgeable manufacturer with trained employees who understand what it takes to make a door that lasts.

Find a company that is committed to the project from the consultation phase until the work is complete, and a manufacturer willing to work one-on-one to build the perfect door. The right partnership means your questions will get answered, and it ensures the door is done right the first time. ■

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