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Why FM Teams Wait Too Long: SOS's Head of Operations on the Hidden Cost of Delay

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Speaking exclusively to FM Director, Andy Cruickshank, SOS Leak Detection's newly appointed Head of Operations, discusses the launch of the company's comprehensive Leak Detection and Prevention Guide, why FM teams wait too long to act, and the shift from reactive response to proactive monitoring.

With UK insurers paying out roughly £1.8 million per day on escape-of-water damage, hidden leaks represent one of the most insidious threats to building integrity and FM team reputation. Andy Cruickshank was appointed as SOS Leak Detection's new Head of Operations in February 2026, bringing nine years of experience with the company and a unique perspective as a former plumber who has worked on both sides of the leak detection challenge. His appointment coincides with the launch of SOS's first comprehensive Leak Detection Guide, a resource designed to address the knowledge gaps that leave FM teams paralysed when faced with hidden leaks.

The Diagnosis Dilemma

"FM teams are really struggling with diagnosing issues," Andy explained. "A lot of the times they know they've got an issue, but they just don't know how to approach it."

The challenge is compounded by scale. Many sites cover thousands of acres with complex plant rooms and extensive buried pipework. For facilities managers watching a water meter tick upwards but unable to pinpoint the source, the sense of helplessness can be overwhelming. "Some of these sites are absolutely massive. All they're doing is watching a metre and they just don't know where to start," Andy noted. "The guide breaks that down a little bit for them."

Whilst fire damage is more dramatic, water's capacity for slow, pervasive destruction makes it equally

devastating. “A lot of leaks can go undetected for years, and by the time it is detected, the damage is already done,” Andy said. “We’ve been in properties where people don’t notice they’ve got water damage, and then we’ve found damage in every room. By the time it’s got to that point, they’re out for six months. All their furniture and belongings are ruined with damp and mould, and some things are irreplaceable. No matter how much money you throw at it, some things you just can’t get back.”

Plumber or Specialist? Getting the Call Right

One of the guide’s core themes is helping FM teams understand when to call a plumber versus when specialist leak detection is required. Andy’s perspective is informed by direct experience on both sides. “I’m a plumber by trade,” he said. “I know what it’s like to be sent in to look for a leak when you have no idea where to start.”

The distinction comes down to visibility and certainty. “Your plumber can fix generic leaks that are visible, and they’ll dig up the ground if they know where it’s coming from,” Andy explained. “But it’s the difference in digging 10 times compared to digging once, which is what we try and do. We try and get there first time, right area, leak repaired, job done.”

Why FM Teams Wait. And Why That’s Costly

One striking pattern emerged from SOS’s 8,000 annual jobs: FM teams consistently delay action until problems become emergencies. “We notice an uptake in work around October,

but there are so many people that tell us they noticed the leak in the summer, but waited until it became a real emergency,” Andy said.

The escalation is predictable. “It gets to the point where it’s gone from a half a day’s worth of work to a whole day for a leak detection company such as us, then builders coming in to remove flooring and walls and drying and alternate accommodation for six weeks. It turns into a much bigger issue than it needed to be.”

The guide includes a telling case study: Traditional approach: 51 days, nine visits, over £2,400. SOS approach: eight days, two visits, approximately £850. Beyond time and cost, the difference lies in professional documentation and accountability.

“You’re getting someone that can do a job from start to finish,” Andy explained. “The quality of our reports set us apart as well. They are fully detailed with photographs, conclusions, recommendations. They tell people exactly what needs to be done and how. It gives FM teams peace of mind that they’ve got a professional who can do exactly what needs to be done.”

Maintaining Excellence at Scale

As Head of Operations, Andy’s role centres on maintaining SOS’s 99% first-visit success rate and 98% SLA compliance across thousands of annual jobs. “Part of my role is further development of the engineers, further training, and also quality control,” he explained. “I run a team of auditors that check the reports, and they’re ex-engineers, so they know what they’re looking at.”

When issues are identified, the response is swift. “We’ll pick it up in audit and we’ll make sure a return

visit is booked ASAP to get back to the property."

From Reactive to Proactive: The IoT Vision

Perhaps the most significant development is SOS's move into IoT-enabled monitoring and early warning systems. "IoT monitoring is the next step," Andy said. "Everything now is smart. And I think it's the next step going forward to limit damage and limit costs. Water is such an expensive commodity now, and losing 100,000 litres soon adds up."

"The sooner you can understand 'I'm losing water, I need to do something about it,' the sooner we can be involved and the sooner it can be rectified. Limiting cost, damage, and shutdown of businesses – that's the overall goal."

This vision aligns with the guide's emphasis on prevention. Rather than waiting for visible damage, IoT systems can alert FM teams to anomalies in water flow or pressure, enabling intervention before minor issues become major incidents.

Nine Years, Six Roles, One Mission

Andy joined SOS nearly nine years ago from British Gas, seeking better equipment and broader challenges. "I always enjoyed finding leaks. I did it at British Gas, but we did it on a shoestring. I wanted to go to a business that offered the training and the equipment and the ability to actually do these things properly: using tools such as thermal imaging and tracer gas surveys."

His progression has been remarkable: senior engineer within six months, then team manager, team leader, operations manager, and national field manager before his current appointment. What keeps him engaged is the culture. "I love that SOS is like one big family.

If you need a hand with something, there's always someone there to help you. I could reach out to anyone in any department and they would say, 'Yes, I'll help you with that.'"

Looking ahead, Andy is most excited about SOS's expansion into commercial FM. "I've been trying to push this for quite some time. We can do great things in the commercial sector." Beyond commercial FM, Andy sees opportunities in drainage and related infrastructure services. "Leak detection will always be our bread and butter, but there's so many other areas that we can get into which will only make leak detection better."

The 24-Hour Action Plan

For FM teams dealing with a suspected hidden leak, Andy's advice is urgent and practical. "Contact somebody and assess the situation. Get your maintenance teams to run a diagnostic of the system to see if they can deal with it in-house. If they can't, get someone on board straight away. The longer you leave it, the worse it's going to get."

The Leak Detection and Prevention Guide provides detailed emergency response checklists, warning sign indicators, and decision frameworks to help FM teams make these assessments quickly. Combined with SOS's proven three-step approach: Detect, Resolve, Report, it offers a clear pathway from problem identification to complete resolution.

To download SOS’s Leak Detection Guide visit: https://www.sosleakdetection.com/leak-detection-guide/