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The building detective: MEP Engineering exec tries to spot problems before they happen

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Water dripping from the ceiling is little more than a nuisance to most people. Just drag a bucket out from the supply closet and wait for the building manager to get someone to check things out.

But for some, small building issues like that can be indicative of bigger problems that need to be addressed in order to avoid costing a lot of money — if they haven't already.

And often, finding the root cause of that problem means finding out who made a mistake, said Mark Scott, senior engineer for quality control at MEP Engineering Inc., based in Centennial.

Scott is a forensic engineer specializing in heating and cooling systems. He analyzes plans while a building is still in the design stages to try and prevent issues before they happen.

Scott also receives calls from all over the country from building owners and managers who have had an incident at one of their properties and want to know what to do about it.

"There are two sides or more to a problem," Scott said. "Someone made a mistake, so you have to figure out what the truth is. You have to get to the truth and not be an advocate. And it often comes down to the simplest, most obvious-looking thing."

After an incident at the Stanford University medical center that involved two pipes that were 20 inches in diameter coming apart, filling the first floor with water, Scott found that the placement of simple concrete bricks to keep the pipes from pushing apart would have prevented the problem.

Forensic engineers like Scott aren't rare in metro Denver, he said. There's a large community of them, and it's growing all the time, due in part to the building boom in the area.

More buildings mean that more people are needed to inspect plans, Scott said, and in a few years, if and when issues crop up among the new building stock, there will be more business for these engineers.



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