
BMU Beneficial Use and Construction Use: Separating Interim Use from Acceptance

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Two kinds of interim use arise in the period between a building maintenance unit's testing and its normal service life. Beneficial use is the operation of the system before acceptance is complete — potentially while findings from factory or site acceptance testing remain open. Construction use is the operation of the system, after site acceptance, by the construction organization — trades using the machine as an access tool to finish the building, before it is handed to the owner's operation. Two questions govern this period, and they are answered by different people. Who decides on interim use is a matter of roles: engineering can state the system's technical status and any conditions or restrictions relevant to interim use; the decision to proceed before acceptance is complete remains with the parties making that decision — owner and contractor — as the schedule and risk decision it is. And what can later be established about conditions that surface during or after this period is an evidence question — and the strength of that answer depends substantially on what was documented at each transition of custody.

A sign-off cannot carry a schedule decision

A project may reach the point where the building needs the machine before the acceptance process is complete, and the request that follows is for engineering authorization — a 'sign-off' — so that use can begin. It is worth being precise about what is being requested. A sign-off is an engineering statement about the state of a machine. A schedule is not an engineering condition. Where findings from acceptance testing remain open, a sign-off issued anyway would state a technical condition that the record itself shows does not exist — and its practical function would be to relocate ownership of a schedule decision from the parties who made it to the engineer who signed it. The workable structure separates the two documents that are being conflated. The engineering side issues a status statement: the open findings, itemized and categorized — which are material to safety and which are not — with the correction and verification path for each defined, and the plain statement that acceptance is not recommended until the defined verification is complete. The decision side — owner and contractor — then decides, on that information, whether to place the system into interim use, and records that decision as its own. Engineering can serve that decision without certifying it: defining the conditions under which interim use can proceed — load and operational restrictions, weather limits, authorized and supervised operators, exclusions, an enhanced inspection cadence for the interim period — is engineering judgment properly placed. Certifying a readiness the findings contradict is engineering judgment misappropriated. The gate on acceptance, meanwhile, does not move: open findings requiring closure under the acceptance criteria remain subject to the defined verification process, regardless of what interim use occurred in the meantime.

Construction use: a different duty profile

A building maintenance unit is designed for maintenance duty: trained operators, planned operations, a defined cycle, loads within a specified envelope. Construction use can deliver a different profile: potentially more frequent operation, different load patterns, materials and debris the design did not contemplate, users whose trade is the façade rather than the machine, and a working environment that is itself unfinished. None of this is improper; buildings get built, and the access system is often the practical way to build them. But the duty delivered during construction can differ, in intensity and in kind, from the duty the machine was specified for — and I have examined machines whose hardest service came before their first day of the work they were designed to do. The engineering consequence is not that construction use should not happen. It is that, after construction use, the machine should not be assumed to remain in the condition in which it passed its SAT without examination — and everything that follows depends on whether the difference, if any, can be established.

What the evidence can establish

When a condition surfaces during or after this period — damage, a component degrading ahead of expectation, a system behaving outside its test performance — the engineering question is its technical character: damage arising from construction use; a condition pre-existing the interim period; wear premature relative to the duty the machine actually experienced; an expected service condition; or, where the evidence does not permit a determination, indeterminate. Those are engineering classifications, established from evidence. What any classification means commercially — under the parties' contracts, warranties, and agreements — is a separate question, answered elsewhere, and this article offers no view on it. The engineering task is not to begin with a party and work backward toward a cause. It is to establish, as far as the evidence permits, the condition of the machine at each custody transition, the duty it experienced between those points, and the technical character of what later emerged. The failure modes article in this series supplies the central instrument: the significance of wear lies in its rate against the duty actually delivered — and a component's early replacement is a different fact on a machine that built the building than on one that never worked before handover. Usage history changes the engineering significance of an observed condition; it does not, by itself, assign that condition to anyone.

What makes attribution an engineering question

The record architecture for this period is short, and every element earns its place at a transition of custody. The acceptance file — the subject of the acceptance article in this series — is the baseline: the system's condition and configuration as tested and delivered. A condition survey at the start of interim use extends that baseline to the moment custody effectively changes. A usage record during the interim period — who operated, for what, under what conditions — establishes the duty actually delivered, the reference against which later wear questions are read. An enhanced inspection

cadence during interim use catches developing conditions while their origin is still legible. And a condition survey at handover — the end of construction use, the beginning of the owner's operation — closes the period with a documented state, against which making-good is defined and from which the owner's service life begins on known terms. None of these documents is elaborate. Each exists to answer, later, the questions technical attribution turns on: what was the system's condition when custody changed hands, and what duty did it see in between. Where those records exist, the technical basis for distinguishing among possible causes is substantially stronger. Where they do not, later attribution may depend on incomplete records and retrospective reconstruction — a form of the documentation decay the first article in this series describes.

The practical posture for an owner or project manager

Before interim use of any kind: obtain the engineering status statement, with open findings categorized; make the interim-use decision as the owner-and-contractor decision it is, and record it; define and document the conditions of use; and establish the condition baseline. During: keep the usage record and hold the enhanced inspection cadence. At handover: commission the condition survey, settle making-good against it, and receive the machine into operation on documented terms — with the acceptance file, the interim record, and the handover survey together forming the founding record the owner's service life runs on. And afterward: read early-service conditions against the duty actually delivered, not the duty originally assumed. The gate discipline runs through all of it: interim use is a decision; acceptance is a verification; and the second is never discharged by the first.

Rauch Safety & Engineering provides the engineering instruments this period runs on — status statements against open acceptance findings, defined conditions for interim use, condition surveys at custody transitions, and independent engineering presence from factory acceptance through handover — conducted independently of the equipment supply chain and the contract delivery chain, with the records belonging to the owner. For systems in service, the same questions are addressed through the Installed Systems Engineering Review™. RSE does not sell equipment, perform service work, or compete with the parties who do. This article is a general discussion of engineering practice; the allocation of costs and obligations among parties is a contractual and legal matter on which it offers no opinion.

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