

improving
workplace safety
and productivity:



the 6-S organization
method.



Workplace organization isn't just good for safety and health programs — it's good for business. Organized work environments promote knowledge, eliminate waste caused by disorder and expose problems that can impact quality and safety. Additionally, a clean, well-arranged and visually standardized work area facilitates value-added activities and promotes positive outcomes that boost business impact.

On the flip side, consider the risks of disorganization. A disorganized work environment obscures hazards, leaving them unidentified and uncontrolled. It disrupts the flow of information and people, which lowers productivity, performance and employee morale. It can even reduce the effectiveness of your safety and health program.

While managers agree on the importance of organized work areas, particularly in industrial environments, they often struggle to implement organizational strategies that yield lasting results. The good news is that there is an approach that has a record of success in addressing these organizational challenges. That strategy is the 6-S system, a proven methodology that can help make workplace organization a core element in your company's culture of productivity and safety.

what's at stake?

risks.

- wasted time searching for materials, tools or instructions
- unclear priorities, creating confusion over what activity to perform next
- reduced quality, confusion and distraction impacting quality of output
- training issues that impact employee learning and development
- increased costs, including equipment breakdowns and unplanned maintenance
- accuracy issues due to a disorganized warehouse and a disengaged workforce

rewards.

- knowledge improvement and ease of access to needed information
- waste reduction and elimination of unproductive searches and distractions
- problem resolution, with clear visibility to identify and address potential issues early
- value-added activity through improved efficiency and reduced distractions
- improved safety via clear and repeatable processes for identifying and addressing hazards
- increased uptime due to a healthier workforce and a safer working environment

the 6-S system:

get and maintain control.

At its core, 6-S is a foundational lean methodology that promotes a safe and organized work area through standards and visual controls. More than just a housekeeping program, 6-S is designed to help businesses identify and solve productivity, quality and safety problems. The strategy is made up of the following steps:

sort.

The first step in workplace organization and safety is to remove excess. Anything not used to create value should be discarded. This includes trash, obsolete parts, damaged equipment, out-of-date materials and unnecessary tools or supplies. These items create confusion and cause delay as employees are forced to work around them. Further, sorting through work areas will lead to safety enhancements, as clutter can hide damaged controls, block access to safety equipment and clog access and egress pathways. Removing unnecessary materials and equipment also reduces the hazards posed by dangerous chemicals or machinery.

set in order.

Now, only the needed materials, tools and equipment are left. The next step is to put them in the best locations to support the activity. Consider the process flow. What items are used? When, where and how often? Place frequently used items in easy-to-access locations. Arrange tools by type and size to support easy identification and return. A well-arranged workstation will reduce slip and trip hazards and improve ergonomics. Additionally, once equipment, materials and tools have designated locations, it will be much easier to apply necessary safety controls and ensure all hazards are addressed. A poorly arranged work environment increases wasted motion and potential exposure to ergonomic hazards, as well as risks related to walking and working surfaces. Setting in order supports the worker by reducing search times and improving flow, elevating both safety and productivity significantly in the process.

shine.

After setting items in order, it is vital to thoroughly clean everything in the work area. The purpose of the cleaning is not to make things look nice; rather, the goal is to make problems more obvious. Dirt, oil, dust and debris on equipment can mask major maintenance issues, such as leaks, failing components and structural damage. Contamination on floors can create slip, trip and fall hazards as well. A clean environment supports quality and safety efforts by highlighting defects and hazards. Early detection allows for proactive measures to be put in place so that costly breakdowns and injuries can be avoided.

standardize.

Once a safe, sorted, set in order and shined environment has been created, the next step is to build in standards to maintain it. Rules and visual controls should be devised to support the continued decluttering, arrangement, cleanliness and safety of the work area. Visual standards, such as lines, labels and color codes are highly useful for communicating organizational information. Effective visuals will make it easy for workers to see when things are out of order and when action needs to be taken. Without standards to support the order that has been created, conditions will likely fall back into chaos. Standardization is what separates a clean-up activity from a true workplace organization and safety implementation.



sustain.

Sustaining workplace organization and safety requires ongoing commitment from management and active participation from the workforce. Management must provide the resources for an effective implementation, including providing workers with time to participate in the organization and safety improvement process. Workforce engagement is crucial, as workers are the subject matter experts in each of their respective work areas – keenly aware of the organizational and safety challenges they face on a daily basis. Daily activities such as audits, inspections, peer reviews and problem solving should be performed to engage both management and the workforce in the continuous improvement process.

safety.

Integrating safety into every step of the organization is critical because everyone involved must have the ability to identify hazards in the workplace. Investing in hazard awareness training will support this effort. Keep it simple. Employees can't be expected to have Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) general industry standards memorized. Discuss common hazard types and provide examples that are relevant for the areas being organized.

key takeaways.

Workplace organization provides the basis for continuous process improvement that drives productivity, quality and, most importantly, safety. Creating order in the workplace brings safety and health hazards to the surface so that they can be identified and addressed.

The 6-S system involves the following sequence of steps:

- sort: identifying unnecessary items and discarding them
- set in order: placing items in the workplace according to how frequently they're used
- shine: removing waste, controlling hazards, and creating order
- standardize: establishing rules and supports to maintain order
- sustain: ensuring ongoing order and improvement through audits and problem solving
- safety: encompasses the other five steps.

Employee engagement is critical. Workplace organization is an opportunity for employees to participate in the problem solving process and take ownership over their work areas. This is especially important in the sort step, because removing materials can be highly personal. Ensure that the reasoning behind the effort is made clear and that employee voices are heard throughout the process.

While a complete 6-S process takes time to implement, don't wait to act. The returns on your efforts, in terms of productivity and safety, will be well worth the effort.

randstad: your partner in safe operations.

Through Randstad's complimentary Safety Smart program, clients have access to resources to help navigate all matters related to safe operations. Backed by a team of experts nationwide, our risk management team recognizes that continued safety in the workplace requires ongoing commitment and attention to detail. This can best be accomplished through client partnership, employee and talent engagement, compliance with federal and local regulations and established best practices related to job tasks and responsibilities.

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