



Article 384

February 8, 2015

5S System Simplifies Production to Improve Profits

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Companies can cut production time, eliminate waste and improve profitability by carefully studying, critiquing and refining the steps involved in manufacturing a product. They can even get better at processing invoices, orders and other paperwork using the same procedure. The nonprofit New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership, or New Mexico MEP, helps companies refine this flow on the manufacturing floor and in the business office.



One tool we use to help businesses improve workplace organization and standardization is a workshop on the “5 S” system. This system deconstructs production into its individual parts to see what steps add value and which waste time and resources.

The five S’s in the plan’s name stand for sort, set in order, shine, standardize and sustain.

How it Works

When **sorting**, businesses evaluate every item in the workspace in terms of its value to production. Anything of dubious value is identified and stored for dissemination or disposal.

Items that remain are **set in order** or placed where they are most logical in the manufacturing process. Tools used in rapid succession — as on a traditional assembly line — are placed where they’re needed and in the correct order of their use. Businesses use color-coding to temporarily identify these places.

The **shine** in the 5 S system refers to making sure all items essential to production are clean, repaired and fully operational. Businesses put worker safety first when upgrading the workspace, tools and machinery, but efficiency improves as well when machines function properly and the shop floor is free of clutter and hazards.

Standardizing is when a business determines the safest, easiest and most effective way of performing the job consistently. Even then, these standards are constantly re-evaluated and tweaked as needed. A standardized workplace might use painted paths to direct workers to the tools they need or the steps they need to take. It might identify the chosen spot for each tool with a painted outline so workers know where to find it and return it.

The final element is **sustainability**, which is what the business does to maintain its improved system. Sustainability, for example, includes setting guidelines for routine maintenance of machinery and creating checklists and instructions that are easy for workers to find.

Worth the Effort

The 5 S system is simple, but maintaining it can be a challenge amid the constant pressure to build products and get them to market quickly — not just to keep customers happy but also to ensure the company is paid as soon as possible for 384_those products. The briefer an order is in production, the better it is for a business’s profitability. And adopting lean manufacturing techniques like the 5 S system ensures that brevity by maximizing efficiency.

New Mexico MEP offers training in the 5 S system and many other techniques when helping businesses make company-wide transformations and improvements. Training includes classroom instruction and in-house visits to evaluate existing operations and suggest how they can be streamlined.

Businesses that want help improving operational efficiency can contact MEP at 505-262-0921 or visit www.newmexicomep.org.

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