

Control of Documents

The purpose of document control is to ensure the copies of essential documents used by different people in the company are of the same and correct version. Therefore, when they are referred to by different people, they each are referring to the same information. It is applied to drawings, computer instruction files, manufacturing procedures, manuals, raw material specifications; in fact all documents referred to as instructions by people within the company, by suppliers or customers.

The versions of documents used may be:

- ☞ The current version, in most cases, or
- ☞ A previous version, if the situation warrants (eg, repairs are being conducted on a previous version or model of the product).

There are a number of important elements to control of documents.

Format

It is preferable to have the format of documents standardised, so that all essential information is included, and in the same location as in other documents, to ensure essential information can be readily found.

Information that should be readily identifiable is:

- ☞ Name of Document
- ☞ Type of Document
- ☞ Serial or Code number of document, if a document numbering system is used.
- ☞ Author of current revision
- ☞ Name of person approving
- ☞ Date of current revision
- ☞ Revision number if a revision numbering system is used.

- ☞ Date or revision number of immediately superseded revision

Approval

The person who is finally responsible for the performance of the area affected by the document should approve it. For example, the Purchasing Manager should approve the Purchasing Procedure. Each revision of the document should be authorised by the same office, or by another that has been authorised by the original office (eg, the Purchasing Manager authorises the Purchasing Officer to update the procedure).

Record Of Circulation

For every document, the recipient of every controlled copy should be identified. This will ensure that once the document is revised, copies of the revision can be sent to everyone who has previous editions.

It does not mean, however, that every copy of the document needs to be controlled. Frequently, provision is made for uncontrolled copies of documents to be issued. A typical example would be an issue of a drawing sent out for quotation. In this event, the copy should be marked "**Uncontrolled Document**".

It is also a good idea to add to uncontrolled documents a comment such as the following:

"If used more than 7 days from the date of copying, the document's author or controlling department should be contacted."

Restriction To Copying

It should be clearly understood that no individual has authority to copy a document without a formal and central record being kept of the copies.

The job's not over until the paperwork's done.

Removing Superseded Documents

It is essential that when a revised document is issued, all previous versions be withdrawn, to prevent their being mistakenly used. Common ways to achieve this are:

- ✎ The issuing department removes all old copies and replaces them with new ones. This is very safe, but time-consuming, and the recipient may then be unaware the document has changed, and continue to work according to the old procedures (which have been taken into memory).
- ✎ All old copies are returned to the issuing department, checked off on the issue list, and destroyed. Non-returned documents are then pursued.
- ✎ The recipients themselves remove, sign and return a cover sheet attached to the revisions, when the old versions are removed. This is also safe, and the cover sheet provides evidence of document control.
- ✎ Trust the recipients to dispose of their own superseded copies, and check on compliance at audit time.

It is also best to include with every revision an updated index page, which shows current revision information on every document. This way, every document holder can double check that their copies are current.

Removal Of Obsolete Documents

The documents should be routinely reviewed to assess whether any have become obsolete, and can be entirely withdrawn from the system. This keeps the scale of the documentation controllable and comfortable.

If a program is useful, it will have to be changed. If a program is useless, it will have to be documented.

A Procedure For Procedures!

Although at first glance the idea may appear to be the essence of bureaucracy, the early development of a procedure for the preparation of documented material is almost essential. Frequently there are two documents: one to describe how a document should be presented, and the other to describe the control system.

Such procedures assist in defining the:

- ✎ Authority to copy
- ✎ Authority to revise
- ✎ Disposal of superseded and obsolete documents
- ✎ Filing requirements
- ✎ Initiating, authoring and approval procedures
- ✎ Record of circulation
- ✎ Uncontrolled copies
- ✎ Format and types of documents
- ✎ Naming of Documents
- ✎ The system of Numbering or Coding of Documents (if one exists)
- ✎ The system of Numbering or Coding of revisions (if one exists)
- ✎ Types of documents