Why Audit Your Maintenance Work Practices

When I mention the word ‘audit’ the majority of you automatically begin to think about dollars and cents or financial audits. Some of you, unfortunately, might even think about that recent encounter with the IRS (hope it turned out in your favor). The audits I am referring to are process and/or function audits.

These audits inspect and review your existing maintenance processes and procedures. In simple terms, if you tell me your team is going to inspect all emergency battery powered lights monthly then I would assume you have a listing of all light locations and a procedure of how and what you want to inspect. An audit of this procedure would involve re-inspecting a percentage of the lights including:

- The review
- The completion schedule,
- Was it on time, and
- Was the testing process followed as it was written in the procedure

So now the quick answer to the question I asked in the title of this month’s Tip of the Month is if you want functions and processes to perform as you designed you must audit. Another little slogan to describe the audit process benefit is “you must inspect what you expect.”

I am sure some of you are sitting there thinking; “gee wouldn’t it be nice if I had something to audit?” That’s a great point. In order to begin the audit process you need to have some sort of system and process in place in order to have something to audit. The first (and best) is to begin developing your processes, keeping it very simple in the beginning.

1. Develop a simple procedure which you gleaned from the owner’s manual and file it manually or electronically.
2. Put a reminder in your Outlook calendar and once a quarter or so pull it out and walk around and inspect to ensure the process is being followed correctly. I would always start with my critical items like life safety, legal requirements, and environmental procedures.
Once you begin to do a little auditing then try to expand the program. Start by brainstorming with your management team and create a list of everything you feel deserves to be inspected on a regular basis. Prioritize the list and begin to write inspection procedures. Remember always start with your critical systems with life safety always being first. Now you have something to inspect and very quickly will have something to audit. Don’t forget to modify your procedures after an audit is completed as appropriate.

As you develop your inspection and audit procedures make sure everything goes into you CMMS (Computerized Maintenance Management System). All of these inspections should be labeled as the work type of Preventive Maintenance (PM). Treat the audit processes as another PM; what you’re actually doing is PMing a completed PM. As the audit PM comes up on the normal PM schedule place it on the work schedule and assign it to a member or the management team. The procedure for the audit should include:

- How many items you should be audited
- Who should be on the audit team, and
- What the audit procedure will be actually followed.

I mentioned above that I would assign the work request to a member of management for the sole purpose of making sure the process remains important and management demonstrates how important the process is to them.

Many experts recommend auditing between 5 and 10% of all completed work requests. Earlier we talked about auditing safety stuff and preventive maintenance work but in reality the audit process should be all work which includes: PM, corrective, reactive or emergency, project work, and make or modify to name a few.

I would not start with 10% right out of the starting gates but instead begin with a 1 or 2% and over time increase the number until you feel you have the right level of auditing and detail for your organization.

Keep in mind the whole purpose for an auditing program is to ensure all maintenance work is completed properly, in a timely fashion, and for a reasonable cost.