



Tool Room Fundamentals – Is it worth the effort?

This month's tip is one that you don't hear much discussion about in the maintenance magazines and journals. For those who are unfamiliar with the term '*tool room*'... tool rooms are secured areas where you store the rarely used tools and equipment, specialty or larger tools that are not considered to be part of the normal personal hand tools.

So...the question, are tool rooms worth the effort? Without a doubt it absolutely is!

The reason they are worth every dollar it takes to make them worthwhile is the fact that no matter how large or small your organization is, you **must** have control of your special and often expensive tools and equipment.

The key here is to set up a system and location where you can store all of your special tools and equipment to ensure they are always ready when the work requires them. You can have a crew of four technicians or 200 it doesn't matter. If you want a 'best in class' organization it is imperative that the team is not constantly wasting time looking for the right tool. Or, even worse, continue to make repairs with the wrong or inadequate equipment. Don't forget organizations that are in 'chaos' are in most cases spending four to six times more time, labor, and money attempting to complete the normal required maintenance tasks as a world class organization. If you don't have control of your tools and equipment you are probably in the 'chaos' culture and mind set. This mind set is costing you a lot of money, customer satisfaction, reduced asset life, and increased capital costs.

So now let's talk about how to set one up, organize, and staff a tool room. I mentioned earlier that tool rooms are effective when you have only a couple technicians or when you have hundreds. In the same context, the size and complexity of your tool room will follow the same portions.

Whether you are large or small; here are some ideas of things to store in your tool room. Keep it in mind it is not always just tools.

- **Specialty Tools** not frequently used
- **Large Tools** that won't fit on carts or buggies
- **Safety Equipment** for confined space and arc flash work
- **Spill Containment Equipment and Supplies**
- **Communication Equipment** like radios and handhelds
- **Shovels, Brooms, Squeegees, and Pry Bars**
- **Ladders and Lifts**



- **Rigging Equipment** like jacks, pullers, hoists, come-a-longs

The bottom-line is that if it is not in a technicians tool bag, pouch, (or like my mechanics Bubba and Skeeter in there five gallon bucket), it should be in the tool room.

Tool rooms should be neatly organized and labeled. Tools on peg boards should be shadow painted and tools on shelves should be spaced so when you do a quick walk by it is easy to see what is missing. This walk by should be done for shift that you have maintenance employees working. If your tool room is not manned full time, this walk by can be done by a clerk, planner, mechanic, or team lead.

The next thing to consider is how to man the tool room. If you are a medium large to large organization that works multiple shifts, you can normally afford to man the tool room full time. The attendant should control who is allowed to check out certain tools and always be able to pinpoint where each tool is. This can be accomplished in several ways, bar code scans, badge scans or placing tags in tool storage locations with mechanic's name or number on it. The key here is to have tools and equipment always accounted for. If you struggle with the cost of having a full time attendant, you might want to consider additional duties which will assist with the return on investment like:

- Sharpening and cleaning tools
- Managing overhaul purchase orders for things like spare motors or gearboxes
- Kitting parts for work orders planners have planned
- Assisting with planning overhauls or outages
- Overhauling small machine equipment like small pumps, cylinders, etc.
- Making keys for door locks
- Managing fire extinguisher program

In some facilities and plants it may work to combine the tool room with the supply room. It takes a little change and people management but where I have seen it in the past it works great.

The last item to consider is the physical location of your tool room. The easiest is to centrally locate it to your facility or plant and quite often near the main shop area. Don't be afraid to look for other options though. If your facility or plant is large and spread out, you may need some satellite tool rooms strategically located to reduce the amount of travel time for technicians and mechanics. All of the above apply except it will more than likely not be manned full time; the accountability side of the business still applies.



So whether your tool room is a small utility closet with a padlock on the door or one that is 5,000 square feet with a full time attendant; keep it organized, up-to-date, and monitored on a shift or daily basis. You will always find it will assist with the success of your maintenance work and the overall success to the organization.