

Safety Corner

What is “5S”?

The 5S concept has its origin in the Toyota Production System reckoning that a well-organized workplace results in a safer, more efficient, and more productive system. Each of the five S's denotes the first letter of five Japanese words, “Seiri,” “Seiton,” “Seiso,” “Seiketsu,” and “Shitsuke.” Typical English translations of these five words are “Structurise, Systematise, Sanitise, Standardise, and Self-discipline,” or “Sort, Set in order, Shine, Stabilise, and Sustain,” respectively. They are designed to preserve the 5S acronym in English usage but somewhat do not carry the original meaning of the five Japanese words.

- Seiri refers to the act of discarding unnecessary and unrelated materials in the workplace. Translated into “Sort” or “Structurise” may not be as direct as “Tidiness” as Seiri calls for simplification of tasks, effective use of space, and careful purchase of items.
- Seiton is more like “Orderliness” than “Systematise” or “Set in order.” Seiton requires workers to set everything in an appropriate place for quick retrieval and storage, enabling an efficient workflow and resulting in a higher productivity.
- Seiso asks everyone in an organization, from workers to managers, to observe and practise “Cleanliness,” which is not exactly “Shine” or “Sanitise.” A clean workplace is a happy workplace; a happy workplace is a productive workplace.
- Seiketsu relates to “Standardize” or “Stabilise” and it calls for defining standards by which personnel must measure and maintain both personal and environmental “Cleanliness.”
- The last S, Shitsuke, refers to “Discipline” and denotes commitment to maintain orderliness and to practice the first 4S as a way of life. The emphasis of Shitsuke is the elimination of bad habits and constant practice of good ones. Once true Shitsuke is achieved, personnel voluntarily observe cleanliness and orderliness at all times, without having to be reminded by management.

The 5S concept has become the way of doing business not only to impress the customers but also to establish effective quality processes as prerequisites for good products and services. Moreover, the 5S concept boosts the morale of the workers, promoting a sense of pride in their work and ownership of their responsibilities.

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