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Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

SOPs provide a foundation for completing processes or tasks accurately, efficiently, and in a repeatable manner. Purposes for SOPs include the generation of quality data and information, reference-base for specific tasks, checklists and quality controls for inspections/audits, and to provide a historical record.

Effective SOP creation requires coordination between several stakeholder groups:

- Staff must determine and report the need for a new or revised SOP to better complete tasks.
- Authors must understand the process or task covered by a SOP and be accountable for providing concise, accurate information that can be verified by peers.
- Managers are responsible for ensuring that routine operations/activities are documented by SOPs and that procedures are prepared and formatted properly.

Preparing SOPs

Once the need for a new or revised SOP is determined, an author is identified based on his or her knowledge and experience in the process/ task. SOPs must be sufficiently detailed to provide a logical progression of required steps that will generate reliable results. Screen shots should be considered as a means of demonstrating steps to be taken. SOPs should also be reviewed by others knowledgeable of the process or task, including managers and end-users, before finalizing.

Formatting and Indexing SOPs

An SOP is only as good as its ability to be accessed, read, and interpreted. For this reason, SOPs should follow strict formatting requirements, such as margins, header/footer information, and section headings. They should be assigned unique numbers based on program or operational units and be easy to retrieve both physically and electronically.

Accessing and Using SOPs

SOPs should be located in binders in designated areas in each applicable work area and/or easily identified as a folder in the organization's shared electronic files. SOPs could also be posted on the organization's Intranet or SharePoint site. Staff performing a procedure initially must verify that the relevant SOP has been read and is understood. A procedure must be completed in accordance with the SOP, with any deviations being recorded for review and possible SOP clarification or revision.

Revising SOPs

Most, if not all, SOPs must be revised or eliminated over time. Courses of action include:

- Document-related issues that do not impact on the procedural scope, such as typographical or printing errors, misaligned pages, or incorrect page numbers can be corrected and reprinted or reposted on the web page or SharePoint.
- Additions can be made by adding clarifications or addenda without having to formally revise the SOP. However, these changes should be reviewed by knowledgeable staff.
- SOPs should be revised during annual reviews, including any addenda and/or clarifications completed. Knowledgeable parties should approve all SOP revisions, eliminations, or consolidations.

SOP Retention

A historical file should be created for each SOP that includes the original document, addenda, clarifications, and all revisions.

Effective creation of SOPs help ensure that processes consistently meet organizational objectives during times of change.