

Finisher's Think Tank



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Checklists—Too Few, Just Right, Too Many?

As we approach the mid year, some companies initiate core activities related to various facets of the operation. Some of these include: end of fiscal year, inventory, audits, chemical & equipment maintenance, and planning for the second half of the calendar year. Whatever the project or requirement, there are probably checklists that were prepared and are consulted for timing, sequence, and fulfillment. Along the way there perhaps are some areas lacking, others seemingly on target, with maybe some over "checklisted." Let us review subjects that would be viable for an effective checklist.

Audits

Internal audits come to mind. Specifically, those associated with professional certifications, such as ISO or NACD. The basic theme of these programs revolves around saying what you do and doing what you say. The backbone of executing the plan is a series of checklists, designed to keep us on track, in a timely fashion. In so doing, we hopefully maintain an organized, consistently improving style of operating the business. By keeping accurate, chronological records, internal audits, leading to annual re-certification, becomes more secure. More importantly, the process is less stressful and assuredly uneventful. Certification has become an important prerequisite to doing business domestically and internationally. It is an advantage for the finisher to purchase goods and services from certified suppliers.

Chemical Maintenance

At some point, process baths, from surface preparation to post treatments, need a tune up or recharging. The timing of when to do what is incumbent on the workload, throughput, and scheduled service. Daily checklists may include confirmation of operating parameters (*e.g.* time, temperature, concentration, and deposit thickness). Weekly checks could encompass the following: analysis (wet chemical, instrumental), plating tests, salt spray evaluation processing standard coupons. Quarterly or semi-annual planning may schedule purification treatments, replacing baths with a fresh make up, or chemical replenishment. The annual checklist may require a total "overhaul and tune up" of specific process baths.

Do not overlook one of the most important chemical checklists, that of the waste treatment system. Non-compliance means lost business, fines, the possibility of pros-

ecution, and non-flattering press articles. In general, checklists may refer to past experience for scheduling chemical maintenance in a timely manner, thus preventing expensive down time or non-compliance.

There are also specifications that require certain procedures to be done on a particular basis. Suppliers are excellent references for control and maintenance of proprietary systems. In fact, most operating technical bulletins include checklists designed around a predetermined schedule. Suppliers also provide their lab and field services to assist in most concerns and work regarding the checklist.

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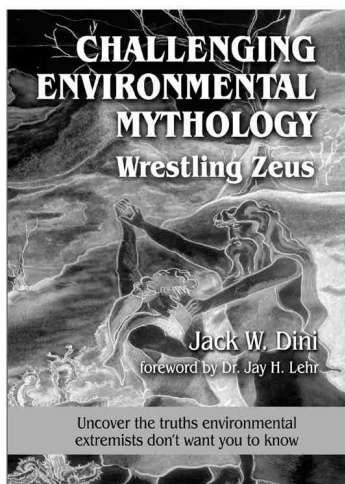
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and on course. Tanks, pumps, heaters, chillers, filters, rectifiers, plumbing, lighting, hoists, and blowers, comprise some of the major equipment that needs attention. Sometimes the equipment is unintentionally ignored. It could be in continuous service and running fine. No problems now do not mean no problems ever. I recall the American Dental Association advertisement: "Ignore your teeth and they will go away." There have been many instances in which long ignored equipment breaks down. The downside is the need to replace worn or shot parts, with non-inventoried new or rebuilt items. This could mean weeks of non-operating equipment. Without a backup, expensive rental of an intermediate whole unit may be imperative. An effective checklist for equipment usually involves recommendations made by the manufacturer or supplier. Their literature, Web sites, and on-product stamped information, is hard to miss.

Individual equipment requires its own distinctive service needs. The checklist would then be selective for each one. I have seen maintenance checklists signed



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and dated, sealed in plastic inserts attached to equipment. Some operations are staffed by in-house maintenance crews that focus on equipment service. Alternatively, outside maintenance firms offer comprehensive service on a contractual basis. Their personnel will assist in devising, scheduling, and implementing appropriate service. Usually, this is done adhering to a checklist. Industry has become automated and computer savvy. In this regard, some maintenance contractors and equipment manufacturers can interface their computers with the item in question, scanning for problems and corrective action over the phone line.

Planning

Planning is often associated with change. This could be in the form of corrective action, operating improvement, upgrades (chemical, equipment, floor space, etc.), new processes, or meeting specifications. Checklists may be prepared and amended as required, based on changing focus or imperative action. Operating budgets and the direction of business may necessitate ample flexibility to the checklist. Abrupt circumstances, such as accidents, major breakdowns, fire/flood, all demand rapid response, based on planning for unforeseen emergencies. Reliable, professional assistance is available through services, such as insurance companies and fire inspectors. Long term planning is typically on-going, as part of improving the business. The checklist may provide for meeting goals related to economic stability or far ranging goals to elevate the business.

We may not feel the impact or acknowledge their presence, but checklists are an essential part of planning and its execution. From a practical standpoint, the related planning and input is a gauge to how successful implementing the checklist will be. More than what could be deemed

as sufficient information and feedback should be obtained. In this case, more is better to build an effective checklist. It pays for associates to over communicate pertinent facts. This will insure that all related parameters and input have been covered and considered. The right checklist is the one that encompasses all critical information and data related to the given project or maintenance. P&SF

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