

Information Bulletin

Importance of Good Communication Habits

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Summary: Developing and maintaining good habits in the use of 3-way communication and repeat back communication is vital to ensuring the message that is provided has been clearly understood and acknowledged. Without this assurance, breakdowns in communications will occur during the discussion of task assignments, scope, and limitations; during the turnover of work activities or responsibilities; and when task status is reported. Communication breakdowns, both oral and written, are precursors to events.

Discussion of Activities: Occurrence reports at the Plutonium Finishing Plant (PFP) over the past several months identify common weaknesses in procedure use and communications habits. A review of Conduct of Operations (CONOPS) related events/conditions at the PFP Closure Project identified a deficiency in overall communications. As such, a management assessment was conducted which yielded information relative to data contained in occurrence reports, critiques, one independent assessment, and several DOE facility representative reports. The assessment evaluated the types of CONOPS deficiencies and areas within facility operations (organizations) where errors commonly occurred. The major areas of deficiencies were: Communications - 32; Change Management – 6; Pre-jobs – 9; Roles/Responsibilities – 7. Communications was further divided into Verbal (28); Written (4).

The management assessment and associated occurrence reports identified typical types of communication failures. These were: ineffective verbal communications at pre-job briefings, less than adequate verbal communications between work groups (in particular - subcontractors), less than adequate verbal communication by work team members to management regarding issues, less than adequate verbal communication between persons-in-charge and vendor subject matter experts, and less than adequate written communications in procedures and work packages.

Analysis: The importance of good communication techniques can never be overemphasized. In many of the cases evaluated the communication failure was caused by imprecise communication habits. On the surface many of the activities were thought to be of a routine nature, when in fact there were nuances associated with each activity requiring more precise communications to ensure work was carried out properly. The lack of strong communication techniques and habits led to several of the identified occurrences.

Recommended Actions: Periodically perform an assessment of current communication practices, both oral and written, to ensure they have not degraded with time. Ensure appropriate conduct of operations communication practices are diligently exercised and maintained.

Cost Savings/Avoidance: Not Evaluated

Work Function: Conduct of Operations - General

Hazards: Not Identified

ISM Core Functions: Develop/Implement Controls

Keywords: Communications

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