

Have you ever spent hours looking for a file that you need, that you thought was on your desk but, is not there. Do you recall the sense of panic and frustration you felt? Imagine how maintenance personnel and storeroom people feel when the part you know you ordered cannot be found. There is nothing more frustrating when a machine is down and the part you need cannot be found. So you order a new part, wait for delivery and then, after the job is done find the part you were looking for. This is the scenario often found when storerooms are merely places where parts are kept.

Many storerooms are receiving and shipping room extensions without documentation. Incoming parts are simply stored on shelves with free space available for convenience only, with little or no thought given to organization.

Surprisingly, when you consider that storerooms play a major role in terms of their contribution to maintenance efficiency and effectiveness, which represent real dollars saved, they are in many cases given little respect. When parts are not tracked and properly stocked, stores become a major contributor to downtime of equipment and capacity losses.

Control of spare parts is essential to prevent machine downtime due to stock outs. There is a trade off, however. Too many parts sitting on the shelf lead to an exponential rise in stockroom costs.

It is critical that storerooms be organized. Organized stockrooms have sections; shelving, drawers, cabinets and bin locations visually marked or labeled in order that all authorized personnel (after a documentation check) can easily target the area(s) directly to locate the required part(s). When maintenance personnel are searching for a part, usually a generic name and descriptive adjective is all that is required e.g. Cylinder –hydraulic. Combining drawers with conventional shelving allows for some hi-density storage and utilizes space more efficiently.

Organizing the storeroom also includes deciding where to locate the stores. The location is critical to the productivity of the maintenance personnel. The closer the storeroom is located either to the maintenance area or to the equipment being maintained, the less travel time in obtaining the parts required is involved. Location of stores could involve many strategic locations or a centralized area. When establishing a centralized area, it should be staffed correctly so as not to create delays for people trying to obtain materials.

An organized stockroom is only half the battle. The other half is having an accurate system in place to manage the activities that take place including:

- Checkouts
- Returns
- Adjustments
- Receiving

Tracking these activities so that accurate counts of quantities on hand can be done manually but, is more effective when using a CMMS. CMMS programs connect purchasing modules, receiving modules, work order modules, etc., to automatically update stock information and set re-ordering schedules. As well, it provides a history of part usage, reliability and cost, which is vital information for both maintenance and purchasing. What becomes critical, is designing the configuration of the CMMS to accurately reflect what physically exists. CMMS allow management to access many reports such as maintenance parts on hand and associated costs, downtime relating to part failure, stock outs, parts where used, inventory turns and vendor reliability.

Maintenance has many different types of parts that need to be tracked through the inventory function of a CMMS. These include but are not limited to:

- Bin Stock – Free issue
- Bin Stock – controlled Issue
- Critical Spares
- Repairable Spares
- Consumables
- Tools

Examining these different kinds of parts will assist to ensure the correct controls are placed on the more important items. Bin stock items that have little individual value but are stored in large quantities, usually fall under free issue where little control is placed. Bin stock items that have a large value and are stored in small quantities, should have more control placed on them. Critical parts are those that usually have high delivery times, causing the machine to be down when they are not on hand. Repairable spares are items like motors and pumps where the repair cost is less than replacement. Consumables are items like batteries, where after consumed they are thrown away. Tools include acetylene torches, wrenches etc, that are kept in a tool crib. It is important to track where the tool is and on what job, so it can be easily located.

Using the CMMS to categorize and catalogue the parts stored in the storeroom as well as the parts that are unstocked, complements the efforts of organizing the store. It facilitates finding the parts you need at the time you need it. The only way to ensure the accuracy of the system is to use it.

Maintaining a stores area that is well organized, visually attractive and clean, contributes to increased employee satisfaction as well as heightened efficiency in the maintenance effort. This, accompanied by a well-configured CMMS database that is kept accurate and current, promotes a pro-active culture within the maintenance department and throughout the entire organization.