

Safety in Standard Operating Procedures

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At approximately 3:00 am, a fire alarm goes off in a hotel. Some guests quickly grab items they need, follow standard evacuation procedures and exit down the stairs. Others sleep through the alarm, while others choose to ignore the fire alarm and stay in the comfort of their bed hoping the alarm will subside. Some may unknowingly exit the building improperly. Some may evacuate the building following an unsafe procedure by taking short cuts by going down the elevator.

This event actually occurred at a Weights and Measures Conference and brings to mind some questions.

Do we have standard operating procedures (SOP) to follow for emergencies during weights and measures inspections? Do we have standard operating procedures that will reduce the risk of injury for our daily inspection routine?

What is a standard operating procedure? A Standard Operating Procedure is defined by Wikipedia as:

“a set of step-by-step instructions created by a business to help workers carry out routine operations. Their purpose is to achieve efficiency, quality output and uniformity of performance, while reducing miscommunication and failure to comply to industry regulations.”
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standard_operating_procedure)

Recently, our Utah Weights and Measures Program was tasked with developing and implementing standard operating procedures. A meeting was held and procedures were developed. It became evident that standard operating procedures are important in all aspects of our weights and measures program. It was also acknowledged that safety guidelines need to be a part of our procedures.

We may need to review our own standard operating procedures and look to see if safety is included. Are we doing it the safest way? If not, we should take the necessary time to implement safe practices during inspections. We may need to begin by selecting one area to improve upon. Once completed, choose another, then another and so on.

Other questions that come to mind include the following:

- When do I need an SOP?
- How often should an SOP be written?
- Do I write an SOP that includes safety procedures?
- Is it necessary for safety to be included in all SOP's?
- Are we following the safety guidelines outlined in our SOP?
- Is the SOP a recommendation or does your jurisdiction require it?
- Are we in a hurry or too busy to follow the SOP?
- Are we letting our guard down?

Take the time necessary to review SOP's and make changes when needed. Don't get too busy to take the required time for proper review. Meet with inspectors and verify they understand the procedures. Make sure safety equipment is available. Keep SOP's current with current policy and practices. SOP's should be current and updated to reflect changing process and procedures.

Does the inspector take time to follow the procedure? Does the inspector feel that there is not enough time to do the job safely?

Other questions to ponder include the following:

- Should I jeopardize my safety by not following safety guidelines identified in an SOP that may cause injury?
- Would my ability to be employed be compromised if my leg, ears, fingers, etc. were injured?
- Do I take the necessary steps and keep myself safe by following a written SOP?
- Do I understand the dangers and possible hazards in my job?
- Am I aware of possible hazards such as; open exposed electrical wires, dangerous insects/animals hiding where I inspect?
- Am I putting myself at risk when performing every day duties? Is my equipment safely bonded/grounded?
- Am I following safety precautions?

We must always have a high level of detailed thinking. Think about what you're doing while you're doing it. Keep your mind focused on what you're doing while performing the job so you don't skip an important step that may jeopardize your safety or the public's.

Although everyone may want to do the right thing safely, everyone's version of the right thing is likely to be different. If SOP's are not followed there will be inconsistency.

Everyone needs to know the procedures. Procedures must be accurate, understandable to everyone, and revised periodically to reflect current conditions. Having accurate and detailed safety instructions ensures that every person follows the procedures the same way each time. The need for implementing safety in standard operating procedures is essential.