



June-July, 2010 Topic Thread: Corrective and Preventive Actions

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Clearing Up The Confusion Between Corrective and Preventive Actions (Post 1):

A corrective action has an element of correction and prevention to it, while preventive actions are to prevent the occurrence of something in the first place. Corrective actions are written with two objectives: first to correct a defect that has occurred and second to prevent the recurrence of the root cause of the defect, thus preventing future defects. Many times both elements are recorded on the same corrective action form. There is nothing wrong with this practice but it can sometimes lead to confusion between an actual corrective and preventive action.

The best way to figure out the difference between a corrective and preventive action is to ask yourself this question. Has something happened or is there a defect that has already occurred? If a defect has already occurred, write a corrective action stating the defect, recording your root cause analysis and conclusion of what the root cause for the defect was, state what you did to fix the defect and finally state what you have done to eliminate the root cause or “prevent” its recurrence.

For example, I had a flat tire in the parking lot. I fixed the tire, thus correcting the defect. I analyzed to determine why the flat occurred. I found that there were numerous nails in the mall parking lot left over from recent construction. I reported this to the mall management and they swept the lot, thus preventing further root cause of the problem and no more flat tires from that particular cause. If I had seen the nails BEFORE the flat tire occurred and reported it to mall management right away, that would have been a preventive action. In other words, nothing happened but I detected a possible problem that could have made my tires go flat. We hope this clarification will help you better manage your QMS. For further assistance, please contact: bclancy@bizphyx.com

Verifying the Effectiveness of Corrective Actions: Continuing The Discussion (Post 2):

Recently, we posted about using corrective actions to correct a defect and prevent its recurrence. After starting this discussion thread, we’ve received questions about verifying the effectiveness of corrective actions. To ensure that an organization’s corrective action system is effectively facilitating continual improvement, ISO 9001 and TL 9000 require that you verify the effectiveness of corrective actions before closing them. Last week, we used the example of having a flat tire in a mall parking lot. We covered that the defect was corrected when we fixed the tire, but that *preventing the recurrence of the defect involved doing an analysis to determine why the tire went flat.*

In our example, the analysis revealed there was a nail in the tire. Further analysis revealed that there were many nails in the mall parking lot and preventing further occurrences would require letting management know that they needed to rid the lot of these nails.

How do we know that the corrective action (involving both correcting the defect and preventing further recurrence) was effective? There are various ways to do this, but in this instance we might return to the lot and inspect to see if the nails had in fact been removed. Therefore, inspection is one way to verify the effectiveness. In other instances, we can review records or interview personnel. If the effectiveness of the action *cannot be verified it should be left open*. Once it can be verified it can be closed. If you have any further questions regarding corrective actions, BIZPHYX consultants can assist you with specific problems in your quality management system. Please visit our website or contact: bclancy@bizphyx.com

Using Corrective Actions For Improvement (Post 3):

This week we are continuing the discussion of corrective actions with a focus on **improvement**. In our previous posts we have provided tips on the elements of a formal corrective action process and why these are important. You may recall that a corrective action must correct a defect or issue, and a corrective action plan must follow to prevent the recurrence of the root cause of the defect. Why is it important to formalize the corrective action process?

The recording and formal reporting of corrective actions helps to change the way members of your organization think about and deal with product and service defects. In short, a formal reporting process spreads the knowledge about a quality issue or defect to management and to others who may not otherwise have known about it. We thereby create a culture of awareness and prevention. Think of it this way. In a world without a formal quality culture, an employee or customer finds a problem and might send an email or call someone to report the problem. Action may or may not happen and nobody follows up to ensure correction. When an organization uses a Quality Management System the same initial report occurs by email or phone, but a corrective action would also be completed and entered in to a tracking system. Management would monitor the corrective action and the resulting “fix” would be communicated formally to other employees. This ensures that the defect and its future prevention are widely known among employees. A best practice might be to communicate these in a quality bulletin, or on a quality Web site. If you need assistance in implementing any of these programs or steps, please contact: bclancy@bizphyx.com

Corrective and Preventive Actions: Wrap-Up (Post 4):

For the past few weeks we have been discussing the keys to an effective corrective action system including the three elements of every corrective action: correcting the defect, analyzing why the defect occurred (a.k.a. root cause analysis) and preventing future recurrences of the defect. Let's wrap up this topic thread by discussing another frequently asked question. ***Should I close a corrective action first or verify, then close?*** You can close the corrective action when you fix the defect, thus meeting a timely interval for taking action to fix that particular defect. However, it remains to be seen whether the root cause has been found and solved. The analysis of the defect's root cause and preventing recurrence may take longer, so don't log verification of the corrective action until you are sure your action plan has been effective.

Let's go back to our original example of the flat tire. Recall that we had a flat tire (defect) and an analysis found the root cause to be the mall parking lot was full of nails. Our analysis led us to contact mall management to ensure that the root cause was cleaned up. Our corrective action was closed when the defect was fixed. However, ***we aren't going to log it as verified until we have confirmed that the root cause has been eliminated***, i.e. there are no nails in the lot. We can inspect the lot, we can hire a third party to inspect and report, or we can contact management to see if they have removed the nails. Any of these are OK, but in this instance inspection is probably the best verification.

Why do all this? We don't want to get back in the car and have a flat tire again if we can avoid it. Again, one of the key elements of an effective corrective action system is not just correcting things after they happen, but preventing them from happening again when we already know about them! This quality management topic was presented by Bob Clancy, SVP of BIZPHYX. For further information, please contact him directly: bclancy@bizphyx.com

