

How to Organize a Warehouse

By Frank Murphy, President, IMS

In 10 years it has never failed. Not even once. At a new client's storeroom or warehouse, I've stood surveying the landfill-like scene in front of me and thought, "Good Lord, what have I gotten myself into"? Even though warehouse organizing is a unique niche within NAPO, the principles of organizing remain the same.

Get Started

Start making a pathway to walk in, empty some trash cans, get rid of any accumulated boxes, cartons, bags, pallets, junk or miscellaneous trash. All the while, repeat to yourself, "I can do this." Think of other successful projects you've completed that began the same way.

Make a Work Space

I use 8-foot, folding tables for sorting. Cleaning out the trash usually frees up some floor space. I use my pallet jack to move pallets around to give me a place to work with no tripping hazards. You probably don't have a pallet jack, but you can clear some space with the tools available to you. Items that are not sensitive to rain, dust or dirt are moved to a temporary staging area. Once this is done and the tables are up, a sense of accomplishment and project control starts to kick in.

Set Up Storage

If storage fixtures are involved, set them up next. Naturally, the space they will be located in will have to be vacant. Be sure they are anchored (if required) and add individual shelves to units only after parts are sorted onto the shelf below. Start from the bottom and work your way up. Leave some space on the shelf, cabinet drawer or pallet rack for additional items.

Attack the Mess

Once storage fixtures are ready, focus on one particular item or class of items at a time. For me, it is usually bearings, oils seals and drive parts, since they are usually stored together. But it doesn't really matter WHAT you're organizing. Search through everything and sort like items. Organize into drawers, bin boxes and onto shelving. This part of the project usually progresses rather quickly and frees up lots of floor space. And there is NOTHING that impresses the client like empty floor space. It says to them, "Hey, you're getting organized!"

Heavy Down, Light Up

When storing items, the heaviest go on the lower areas (knee level and below) while the lighter items can be stored higher. This keeps clients injury-free. Frequently, I cringe when I see a really heavy item stored on a top shelf. Heavy things belong on the floor.

KISS Your Locations

Once all the organizing is done, start marking the locations. Be sure to **KISS** your locations (**Keep It Short & Simple**). In warehouses, shelving is set up in rows, so I use Row A through Row Z, numbering shelves consecutively. For example, A-04, A-27, A-101. Drawer cabinets are simply C4-D12 (cabinet 4, Drawer 12).

WIIAWII

No, I do not have my finger jammed in a drawer, nor is this an exotic Hawaiian drink. It is an acronym which stands for **What It Is And Where It Is**. In a paper or electronic database, this tells the client where to find what they're looking for. In a warehouse, this data comes from the physical inventory where you record a part number, part description, location and quantity on hand. The description contains all you need to know about the part.

Now you're prepared to organize your first storeroom or warehouse. Attitude, determination and organizing talent will see you through to a successful completion. So when a craftsman comes in and says to you, "Have you seen a long skinny thing with 3 wires attached to a flat part with a hooky thing at one end and a hole in the middle"? You can cheerfully reply, "Sure! What color"?

Frank Murphy is a former NAPO-GA member and founder and president of Inventory Management Services Inc. of Greenville, SC. IMS specializes in facilities and manufacturing parts storage area and tool crib design, setup, relocation, organizing, physical inventory and bar coding in order to reduce costs, improve efficiency and maximize use of available space. IMS also provides services to bar code, identify and track assets using the customizable BCAT software program.

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