Maintaining an Effective Workstation

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
1. Review the importance of maintaining an effective workstation
2. Review the process for maintaining decontamination workstations
3. Identify the steps needed to effectively maintain preparation area workstations
4. Identify the steps needed to effectively maintain workstations in the sterilization and storage areas

MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE WORKSTATIONS IS CRUCIAL FOR ensuring an efficient process flow in the Central Service/Sterile Processing (CS/SP) department. Having all the necessary supplies available when needed and within easy reach is a key factor in effective medical device processing.

This lesson will identify the basic steps necessary to maintain workstations in each area of the CS/SP department and ensure effective, efficient processes and work flow.

OBJECTIVE 1: REVIEW THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING AN EFFECTIVE WORKSTATION
Each time a technician has to leave his or her workstation to locate a needed supply, frustration can arise for that technician. Additionally, searching for the needed supply increases processing time for an instrument/set, which can frustrate the customer and increase the potential for errors. Time spent looking for instruments, indicators, wraps and other necessary items is especially problematic when the item being processed is needed quickly.

In today’s busy CS/SP departments, the belief or assumption that there is not enough time to properly clean and restock a work area is frequently experienced. It is important to note, however, that time spent properly maintaining a workstation is regained because less time will be needed to process an instrument/set.

Personal comfort and safety are important factors in producing a quality product and maintaining an effective workspace throughout all shifts. Keeping the workspace clean is important as it keeps the area free of lint and dust (lint...
and dust can inadvertently fall into a pack or tray and, thereby, contaminate the instrument/set and negatively impact patient safety. Adopting and implementing a standardized set-up for each workstation helps ensure employee comfort. Having frequently-used items like indicators, cleaning brushes and sterilization load labels, for example, within arm’s reach helps reduce fatigue and the potential for errors. Items that are used less frequently can be placed in an area of the workstation that does not compete for space needed for frequently-used items. Depending upon available space, supplies that are only used occasionally may be stored in other areas, as opposed to on the workstation.

**OBJECTIVE 2: REVIEW THE PROCESS FOR MAINTAINING DECONTAMINATION WORKSTATIONS**

Many CS/SP technicians may assume the sink area is the official workstation in the decontamination area; however, the entire decontamination area should be considered a workstation of sorts. When instruments are received, there is limited time to begin the decontamination process before biofilm begins to form or bioburden dries (both of which make the decontamination process more difficult). It is important to ensure the entire decontamination area is stocked and ready for each shift, so technicians do not have to stop work to gather necessary supplies or equipment. Taking a few minutes to assess the work area and ensure all necessary supplies, tools and equipment are available at the start of each shift will save time and frustration over the course of the shift. Part of maintaining an effective workstation involves keeping the area clean and free of clutter. Workstations should be placed on a routine cleaning schedule to reduce dust and lint that may be introduced into a set. Clutter contributes to confusion and precious time being spent searching for items.

What follows are some key workstations/areas that should be checked and set up prior to the start of each shift:

- **Donning/doffing area:** Ensure there is enough personal protective equipment (PPE) available for the entire shift (remember, new PPE will be used after each break and any time a technician is called from the area for any reason). If trash receptacles are full, they should be emptied. Handwashing soap should also be checked to ensure enough is in the dispenser to get technicians through the shift.

- **Computer scanning area:** The computer scanning station is also used for printing, it is important to ensure paper, ribbons and other computer supplies used are stocked and restocked, as necessary.

- **Sinks:** Checking the sink area is very important. This check should involve the following:
  - Ensure the manufacturers’ instructions for use (IFU) are accessible.
  - Ensure the water level and temperature tapes (if used) are intact; if not, replace them before the sink is filled, if possible. (See Figure 1)
  - Check faucets, spray arms and sink plugs to ensure they are in place and work properly.
  - Ensure the air gun and tips are intact and clean.
  - Ensure borescopes and magnifying lenses are clean and intact.
  - Ensure timers work properly, are clean and are in the appropriate place.

- **Workstations:** Workstations should be placed on a routine cleaning schedule to reduce dust and lint that may be introduced into a set.
» Check the cleaning chemicals to ensure enough is available to complete the shift.
» Check cleaning brushes and ensure they are located near the sink. Keep brushes organized by size and type for easy identification. Ensure enough cleaning verification products are available for the shift.
» Ensure enough tags are available to mark broken, dull or otherwise malfunctioning instruments over the course of the shift.
» Ensure enough towels/cleaning cloths are available to prevent technicians from having to leave the work area to replenish them.
» Keep each work area well organized and free of clutter.

• Cleaning equipment checks should include the following steps:
  » Ensure all equipment is in proper working order; report any equipment that is not working properly.
  » Ensure the quantity of equipment testing material is at least adequate for the shift.
  » Check the chemicals needed for the cleaning equipment; ensure enough is available to cover the entire shift (this includes the large drums of chemicals).
  » Ensure auto dispensers are properly placed into the chemicals and are working properly.
  » Check and clean screens and spray arms.
  » If the equipment uses printer tape, ensure enough is available for the entire shift.
  » Verify the equipment IFU are available and readily accessible.
  » Check all transport carts to ensure they are in working order; if not, remove them from service.
  » Check to ensure the area is clean, tidy and free of clutter.
  » Ensure trash bins and linen hampers are emptied, as needed.

At the end of each shift, excess supplies should be put away and the workstation should be cleaned in preparation for the next shift.

OBJECTIVE 3: IDENTIFY THE STEPS NEEDED TO EFFECTIVELY MAINTAIN PREPARATION AREA WORKSTATIONS
A tidy and well-organized workstation is necessary to help ensure the assembly process functions smoothly and efficiently. The following processing/assembly areas should be checked and stocked at the beginning of the shift to help ensure greater efficiency in the assembly process.

• **Computer station:** This area should be free of dust and stocked with enough paper, labels and toner to get through the entire shift.

• **Manufacturers’ IFU:** All instrument and supply IFU should be available and readily accessible.

• **Cleaning verification products:** The workstation should be carefully checked to ensure all supplies and equipment are available for each type of verification being performed.

• **Inspection equipment:** Magnifying devices and borescopes should be clean, available and in good working condition. Scissor testing material, index cards and plastic dowels should also be checked to ensure enough are available for the shift.

• **Bins:** Bins that contain products needed to complete tray/pack assembly must be clean and checked to ensure appropriate stock is available for the shift. These products should include absorbent liners and, if used, chemical indicators, tip protectors, locks and missing instrument/repair tags.
• **Peg boards**: If present at the workstation, peg boards should be checked and restocked with the most frequently-used instruments/items.

• **Wrap stations**: Ensure enough flat wrap, rigid container filters, peel packs, corner guards, missing labels and indicator tape are available for the shift.

• **Heat sealing areas**: Heat sealers should be checked to ensure they are working and have the correct temperature for sealing.

• **Insulation testing area**: Ensure all products needed to test the insulated instruments are available and that the equipment is in working order. (See Figure 2)

At the end of the shift, all extra supplies should be put away and the work area should be cleaned in preparation for the next shift.

**OBJECTIVE 4: IDENTIFY THE STEPS NEEDED TO EFFECTIVELY MAINTAIN WORKSTATIONS IN THE STERILIZATION AND STORAGE AREAS**

Keeping sterilization and storage areas clean and clutter-free is important. The following sterilization and storage work areas should be checked and maintained to help ensure effective work practices are followed during the shift:

• **Computer stations**: Ensure enough paper, toner and labels is available for the shift.

• **Carts**: Ensure sterilizer and transport carts are clean and working properly. If carts are missing, they should be located, if possible.

• **Manufacturers’ IFU**: IFU should be accessible and readily available for all employees in the sterilization and storage areas. IFU in the sterilization area should include the sterilization and cooling parameters for each device. In the storage area, IFU are needed to ensure all storage requirements are met.

  The sterilization area has a few more items that should also be maintained. Those include:

  • **Sterilization supplies**: Ensure enough printer paper is available for each type of sterilizer. Ensure air removal tests are also available, if needed. Load tag application guns should be checked to ensure they are working properly and also ensure a sufficient quantity of labels is available. Sterilant and supplies for low-temperature sterilizers should be checked and replenished, as needed.

  • **Biological indicators (BI)**s**: Ensure BIs for each type of sterilization are checked and adequately stocked. Incubators should be checked for cleanliness and appropriate temperature. If a manual documentation system is used, adequate space should be provided for proper documentation in BI logs.

To ensure effective workstations are maintained in these areas, it is also important to consider how items are moved from the sterilization area to the storage area. Taking the full (and cooled) sterilizer cart to the storage area and removing items as the appropriate storage aisle is reached (if possible) will streamline efficiencies for the technician.

At the end of the shift, all extra supplies should be put away and the work area should be cleaned in preparation for the next shift.

**IN CONCLUSION**

Ensuring workstations are cleaned, organized and well stocked directly impact work flow and departmental efficiencies. When a work area is properly maintained, less time and energy are spent looking for needed items, which translates into less frustration for the technician and customer, more efficient device/set processing, and higher quality products being delivered for the healthcare customer and the patient.

**RESOURCES**


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1. Maintaining a clean, organized and well-stocked workstation:
   a. Ensures the department will be survey-ready
   b. Helps create a more efficient process/work flow
   c. Is the first step in the supply ordering process
   d. All the above

2. Each time a technician leaves his or her workstation to locate needed supplies:
   a. The manager should document how long it takes to return to the workstation with the item(s)
   b. The technician’s job satisfaction is adversely affected
   c. The potential for errors increases
   d. None of the above

3. When needed supplies are not available at the workstation:
   a. Technicians may become frustrated
   b. The department’s customers may become frustrated
   c. The amount of time needed to process a set increases
   d. All the above

4. Having frequently-used supplies within arm’s reach:
   a. Reduces fatigue and the risk for errors
   b. Frees up time for employee breaks
   c. Is unnecessary if the department is small and items can be retrieved without having to walk too far
   d. Requires a very large workstation to accommodate those supplies

5. In the decontamination area, which of the following can be considered the workstation:
   a. The sink area
   b. The donning and doffing area
   c. The equipment cleaning area
   d. All the above

6. Computer scanning areas should be checked:
   a. By the departmental manager
   b. During designated times throughout the shift
   c. At least weekly by a Biomedical Engineering professional
   d. At the beginning of the shift

7. The sink area in the decontamination area should be checked:
   a. To ensure air guns and tips are clean and intact
   b. To ensure enough printer paper is available for the washers
   c. To ensure enough personal protective equipment is available for the shift
   d. To ensure the water is the proper temperature

8. The equipment cleaning area should be checked:
   a. To ensure the equipment manufacturer’s instructions for use are available and readily accessible
   b. To ensure the screens are clean
   c. To ensure the auto dispensers are properly placed
   d. All the above

9. Preparation/assembly workstations should be checked for:
   a. Biological indicators
   b. Air removal tests
   c. Magnifying equipment and borescopes
   d. Sterilizer printer paper

10. Insulation testing workstations should be checked for:
    a. Proper temperature of the testing equipment
    b. Missing labels and temperature meters
    c. Adequate amounts of insulation testing products
    d. All the above

11. When assessing sterilization and storage areas:
    a. Carts should be checked to ensure they are clean and well functioning
    b. Cleaning verification products should be over-stocked
    c. Heat sealers should be checked for proper function
    d. None of the above

12. In the sterilization and storage areas, instructions for use:
    a. Should always be available and readily accessible for all employees
    b. Should be on hand whenever a new employee is being trained in the area
    c. Should be printed and placed in a single binder and marked “IFU”
    d. Are rarely needed

13. Which of the following is an effective way to improve efficiency in the sterilization and storage areas?
    a. Stacking items on a transport cart and moving them to the storage area
    b. Carrying one tray at a time from the sterilizer to the storage area
    c. Moving the full (cooled) sterilizer cart to the storage area and removing the items from the cart as the appropriate storage aisle is reached
    d. None of the above

14. Sterilant and supplies for low-temperature sterilizers should be:
    a. Stocked by the lead technician at the end of each shift
    b. Monitored and documented at least three times per shift
    c. Evaluated for effectiveness at least once a month
    d. Checked and replenished, as needed

15. Maintaining an effective work area helps produce a quality product for the healthcare customer and patient.
    a. True
    b. False

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