

Hot Work and Hot-Work Permits

“In skating over thin ice, our safety is in our speed.”

by Dan Zahlis

Many will recognize that quote as belonging to Ralph Waldo Emerson, but the words just as easily could have been spoken by a maintenance person refusing to complete a hot-work permit.

Hot-work permit programs are notorious for invoking the ire of maintenance people, because hot-work programs frequently rely on generic permits that lack specificity and practicality. Early in my career, I vehemently supported disciplinary action for these incredulous maintenance people. Later in my career, after realizing that compliance was less important than results, I realized the maintenance folks had been right all along.

It wasn't until I went toe-to-toe (his were made of steel) with a burly maintenance man that I altered my perspective. This fellow refused to use “my” hot-work permit to perform spot welds throughout a manufacturing plant. We involved everybody's boss, and Human Resources, because if I had my way, this guy was going to be fired!

After behaving like children starved for attention, we both took a deep breath and he asked me, “Do you want me to show you what's wrong with ‘your’ permit?” Several days later, he walked into my office and handed me the hot-work permit “they” would be willing to use (he had been recruiting).

It was amazing! It lacked all of the generic precautions that mine contained and included the direction and detail that his job required. His permit included specific locations, equipment and fire risks in and around his work area – by name and number.

He assured me that he and his

co-workers were not opposed to reasonable precautions, but with the time constraints they were under, they needed to maximize the utility and effectiveness of their time. He assured me that his entire department would complete generic permits and turn them in to comply with the law, but they didn't have time to waste “acting” like they were taking precautions listed on “my” permits.

This fellow went on to manage the hot-work program for us and he co-developed (with other maintenance employees) the hot-work permits throughout our enterprise. He also took the lead as our hot-work permit trainer and was relied upon to qualify contractors working at our facilities.

Hot-work permits can save companies millions of dollars in avoided property damage and lost revenues following business interruption, prevent severe injuries and save lives. However, the permits also can threaten a company's culture, waste a company's resources and add to the pile of combustible materials lying around if careful attention is not applied to the content and format of the permit.

What Gets Measured

Active Agenda's Hot Work and Hot-Work Permits modules allow organizations to inject practicality and specificity into their fire prevention effort. These modules help organizations characterize their hot-work risks by quantifying the types of hot work performed, the frequency of performance (by location, by type, etc.), the specific hazards present and the identity of key people participating in the fire prevention effort.

The Hot Work modules also can help organizations prioritize and target employee training based on the frequency of hot-work types, and convert hot-work performers to “process owners” based on measurable participation in the hot-work permit process.

The simple method for updating hot-work assessments within the Hot Work module and automatically generating permits in the Hot-Work Permits module can save organizations the cost of printing the far-less-effective generic permits.

What Gets Done

The Hot Work module allows organizations to record hot-work activity assessments throughout an enterprise. The assessments result in a list of required precautions specific to a hot-work type in a specific location, accounting for location characteristics possessing unique and specific fire risks. The Hot-Work Permits module allows organizations to automatically generate hot-work permits based on the assessments recorded in the Hot Work module. Any modifications to the assessments are automatically included in future permits.

These “real-time” permits ensure that all people performing hot work under permit always will benefit from the latest assessments of specific hot-work types, occurring in specific locations. This method of permit maintenance and improvement reinforces employee ownership and enables immediate incorporation of employee contributions.

This Month's Links:

■ **Written Program:** http://www.activeagenda.net/documentation/index.php?title=Hot_Work_Activity

■ **Support Wiki:** http://www.activeagenda.net/documentation/index.php?title=Hot_Work_Module

■ **Forum:** <http://www.activeagenda.net/discussions/viewforum.php?f=45>

■ **Hot-Work Permit:** <http://demo.activeagenda.net/reportsphp?mdl=hwp&rid=1>

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