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Non-Standard Operations and Permits to Work

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Technical Paper

Many companies have their core operations well under control and then an accident occurs during an activity which is not directly related to these core operations. Quite often, this activity is being carried out by a contractor, whom the company regard as being an "expert". This describes the simple steps to take with such operations.

What can go wrong?

This shows a typical example of non-standard operations at a printing company. Contractors had been brought in to work on the heating system.

This (unstaged) photo shows the three prime problems:

Problem	Comments
1. Contractor exposed to risk because of the contractor operations	The contractor can fall from height
2. Employee exposed to risk because of the contractor operations	An employee can be hit by objects dropped from height. Note that there is no barricade to keep people away.
3. Contractor exposed to risk because of the company's operations	The contractor can be hit by the forklift truck. Again, note that there is no barricade to keep segregate the forklift truck operations.

Note that, although contractors may have method statements, they normally only address problem type [1] and definitely not type [3]

The key reasons for a having a permit to work are to make you stop and think what the risks may be and how they can be controlled, and also to act as a formal communication system on the stages of the operations so that normal work can be resumed after the non-standard operations have been completed.

Typical pitfalls include confusion about whether or not the work is complete; this can lead to standard operations being reinstated with a contractor still working. The formal sign-off overcomes this.

An example of a permit to work is given overleaf. The SSS standard permit has a list of prompts on the back.
The key features are:

Description and duration of work	
Risks and precautions	This is where you list what the risks may be and how you control them, eg the risk may be to employees moving below the work at height, and the controls may be to barricade with tape, etc., the area below the work.
Sign on	This covers both the contractor and whoever is in charge of the area where work is being carried out, acknowledging that standard operations may need to be suspended or modified.
Sign off	Again, this covers both the contractor and whoever is in charge of the area where work is being carried out, acknowledging that standard operations can now be safely reinstated.

Is this too onerous?

The simple answer to this is "no". It should only take a couple of minutes to complete this form, but it does make you stop and think and put control measures in place.

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White copy: Contractor
Coloured copy: Retained Client

Permit to Work

Description and duration of work

Area	
Start date	End date
Description of work	

Risks & Precautions

Risks	Safety precautions

Sign on

Person carrying out the work	Manager/Supervisor in the area affected by the work
I have organised the safety precautions listed above and am aware of the risks from the operations in that area.	I acknowledge that the work listed above will be carried out and have briefed the person carrying out the work of the risks from our operations in that area.
_____	_____

Sign off

Person carrying out the work	Manager/Supervisor in the area affected by the work
The work specified above has been completed and I have removed all people, tools and materials from the area so that normal operations may continue	I have inspected the area and am satisfied that normal operations may recommence.
_____	_____

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