Who Wrote The "Book" On Facility Management?

Keeping vital information up to date may seem like a tedious task, but it's one of the most essential aspects of successful operations.

By Charles Carpenter

t's safe to imagine that when the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) opened, there was probably no "book" on how to manage the facility. (The LHC is a massive particle acceleration facility operated by CERN [the European Organization for Nuclear Research]. It sits astride the Franco–Swiss border near Geneva and exists with the sole purpose of answering the most complex questions in physics.)

With a circumference of 26,659 meters (that's just under 16.6 miles), it's one of the most unusual facilities in the world. And because of its dual bordered configuration, one has to wonder if the facility manager (fm) follows the French or Swiss workplace safety guidelines, among other logistical conundrums.

While the LHC is an amazing scientific undertaking, managing this facility should not be rocket science. As the facility was built and equipment added, someone in facilities management (FM) should have been assembling a book to help manage this built environment. All the information should end up somewhere specific and easily accessible, when needed.

Plenty of good books on FM have been written (David G. Cotts' *The Facility Management Handbook* and Mark Brathal's *High Performance Facilities Management* come to mind); however, when someone starts talking about a specific facility, be it the LHC or the Shiner Brewery, odds are good that nobody wrote *that* book before.

Each fm is responsible for writing his or her own book. Codes, company policies, and best practices make up just a few chapters. This information needs to be safely kept and collected in one place. While someone could be a walking encyclopedia of FM, specific, critical information could be inaccessible or lost due to personal vacations, accidents, or layoffs.

The table of contents for the book can be built around information that cannot be easily recreated or Googled. This book will not be written in a day—nor should it be approached as a term paper to be written the night before it is due.

One can expect it to grow over time with many contributors. In many cases, vendors and contractors could be required to provide the appropriate information in the desired format.

After an organization figures out who ends up writing the book, the next decision will be deciding where it will be kept. Will it be in a specific office or computer? Should it reside as electronic files with paper backups? Or could it be stored on duplicate flash drives? At some point it needs to be archived,

whether that means burning copies to CDs, DVDs, or tape backup as part of an organization's business continuity plan.

The big stumbling block in writing a book on FM is keeping it up to date. Recent changes to the Americans with Disabilities Act, revisions in local ordinances, or developments in greener technology can all trigger changes. While these changes may make a chapter seem out of date, the important information in the book is still relevant and irreplaceable.

Shifts in the economy may also trigger temporary revisions to the business of FM. For example, when budgeting for a new facility, someone might have to estimate the value of scrap metal at the end of the lease, as the glut of used furniture on the market may mean that cubicles are worth more as scrap metal than as furnishings.

Even at the LHC, a safety analysis was assessed by a group of independent scientists (Do you think an fm was included in the group?) after a few years of operation. This analysis should have resulted in a revision to their FM documentation.

Things to check your book for:

- Is information really where it is supposed to be? Changes in personnel may have resulted in the loss of basic information. Drop by your receptionist or whoever answers phones and see if he or she is prepared for a bomb threat.
- Where can you share important numbers and contacts? The phone number and ESI (electric service identifier) ID used in a power outage can be printed and distributed to dozens of people. At worst, 12 people call to report the same outage.
- Is information being backed up? If the IT department is supposed to be archiving any FM information, can it show you that this is happening at the required intervals?
- Have your evacuation maps kept up with reconfigurations?
- Who is confirming that the GenSet is being tested routinely? Recently, a few hospitals have had generator issues, from copper theft to malfunctions, which should have been detected before a critical need arose.

The book of FM is not something to be written and placed on a shelf. It is safe to say that an fm's book is always subject to change and, like R.D. Cumming said, "A good book has no ending." **TFM**

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