



Why do we care about “scope of work?”

2014-ORNL-FREE-63

February 4, 2014

Oak Ridge National Laboratory

Why do we care about “scope of work?”

The first thing we ask when creating a Work Order, Work Plan or a Research Safety Summary is “What’s the scope?” You may have asked more than once, “Why do you care?” The scope of work is a description of the work activities that is in sufficient detail and clarity so that the hazards associated with the work can be identified and controls can be selected to protect the workers from the hazard. A well-defined scope can also help those planning an activity to appropriately schedule, assign resources and set priorities.

Here’s a somewhat simple example. A coworker asks you to help him move some equipment between two areas. He says there’s not much and it probably wouldn’t take more than an hour. You agree and follow him to the area where the equipment has been packed into ten copier paper boxes. Do you still agree this is something the two of you can do with no further resources?

You look into the first box and realize that it contains some sizable metal parts. You attempt to lift the box just enough to get a feel for how heavy it is and guess it’s at least fifty pounds. Do you still agree this is something the two of you can do with no further resources?

You look into the next box and note that it contains some oils and cleaning solvents. Do you still agree this is something the two of you can do with no further resources?

Your coworker says that he will pull the Division’s van around to the door closest to the area so you two can begin loading the boxes into the van. What do you think now? Should you continue? The truth is that all of these new pieces of information should have prompted additional questions.



Why do we care about “scope of work?”

2014-ORNL-FREE-63

February 4, 2014

Oak Ridge National Laboratory

For instance, should you be lifting that many heavy boxes or even one of them? Is a cart needed? What are the oils and cleaning solvents, and should they be moved this way? Where are they being moved to that the task requires moving by vehicle? All of these questions and more can be tied back to needing a better definition of the “scope of work.”

This is a simple example of a small scale task, but it points out the kinds of things we should be asking ourselves when we are defining the scope of the work activities for our Work Orders, Work Plans or Research Safety Summaries. The following are some basic questions you can also use to guide yourself when defining scope.

- Could anyone on the work team pick up the description of work and understand his or her role in completing the work?
- Is the scale of the work reflected (e.g. Will the work require the occasional use of solvents or the daily use of gallons? Will we need to move hand tools and small items or numerous bags of grass seed for several hours)?
- Are the work methods considered (e.g. how are things going to be moved, assembled, treated, created, tested)?
- Who’s going to do the work? Are they experts or novices?
- Where will the work be done? Does the location present any additional hazards or logistical issues?

Remember, the primary point of going through any form of work planning and control exercise is to create a plan that will help workers perform the work safely. We rarely come across activities we just can’t do if we plan well. Spending the time necessary to ensure the scope is well-defined and understood helps the entire team of workers and their support staff make informed decisions, ensures that hazards can be identified and limits unnecessary stops and starts.

Contact: Teresa Cochran, cochrantj@ornl.gov