Quality Documents and Their Control

Documents are part and parcel of any construction project, be it a small, medium or a large one. Large projects like industrial and realty construction projects usually comprise of a number of departments working in co-ordination with one another and most of them generates a considerable volume of documents. One of the highest document producing divisions in most projects is the quality (QA/QC) division.

The movement or the flow of these documents needs to be controlled for efficient functioning of any project, especially the larger ones. No wonder “document control” in a large project by itself is a kind of elaborate and heavy-laden responsibility and such projects often maintain fully-fledged document control divisions manned with dedicated staff. Yet, control of the perpetually generated documents is the responsibility of each of the individual departments of a project and quality department is no exception either.

So, what, after all, is a quality document? The examples are many. All those documents concerning quality assurance, all the records generated during quality control, all correspondance concerning the quality aspect of a project, etc are nothing but quality documents.

Some typical examples of quality documents in a construction project are: material test certificates (vendor’s) & reports (site lab); field or laboratory test reports; field quality inspection reports such as concrete pour cards, quality inspection reports for incoming materials; as-builts; audit schedules & reports (internal and external); non conformity notices or reports; survey and other record sheets; ITPs; job procedures or method statements; technical specifications; formal requests for quality inspection & testing to consultants, clients and third parties; inspection check-lists; third party test reports; drawings; QAP documents; list or register of various survey and laboratory equipment; their calibration certificates, schedules and periodic calibration reports; quality meeting reports; all internal and external correspondance concerning any quality related matter or the quality division of a project and so on and so forth. (Drawings are sometimes regarded as project execution documents rather than quality documents).

So, it is obvious how much documents the quality division alone of a large project needs to produce. Proper controlling of all those documents is of utmost importance in order to ensure smooth functioning of the entire division as well as the project itself. A lot of that responsibility lies on the quality division itself even if a well-developed document control department functions simultaneously. The same is true for all other divisions of a project.

Like any documentation system, control of QA/QC documents too mainly comprises of receipt of documents, thorough scrutiny of them, proper distribution of documents and storage, ie filing of the same for future reference.
Varieties of quality documents such as test reports, drawings, quality related correspondence, etc would keep coming to the project quality division all the time. Usually, these documents come from the document control division with covering letters showing full details, dates, etc. Even though the document control department maintains many of the records, the quality division too needs to maintain separate records of all the documents for easy future reference. This also helps in keeping track of the up-to-date versions of many documents such as work procedures, drawings and so on.

All documents received and generated need to be well examined before going ahead with subsequent action including distribution and storing. This ensures proper ensuing action and distribution & filing in an appropriate manner. Quite often, it also ensures rectification and modification of incorrect or incomplete documents such as laboratory test reports, etc prior to distribution and storing.

Distribution of quality documents such as test reports & certificates, inspection reports, various internal or external correspondence, etc too need careful attention and record keeping for future reference. This is usually facilitated by attaching covering letters to various sets of documents to be distributed. Normally, general procedure for document identification is a part of a contract document which formulates the procedure for numbering documents and files. The same needs to be followed meticulously.

Proper storage or filing of quality documents is of utmost importance. While the mastercopies of many documents such as drawings, specifications, job procedures, etc are usually maintained by the document control division, the most up-to-date copies of all relevant documents have to be maintained by the quality division as well. Quality related documents belonging to a different categories or job packages are always filed in separate folders for smooth traceability.

All filed documents must be fully indexed and be readily traceable as described in documentation methodology of the contract document.

A master file index should be maintained listing all the existing folders. An updated copy of this file index is given to document control division as well.

No quality document should be removed without knowledge of the quality division.

The head of the project quality division (QA/QC manager) can conduct audit to ensure proper implementation of the documentation procedure in any division of a project and such audit reports too are stored separately as quality records.
As already mentioned, documentation by itself is a quite elaborate and vital aspect of any construction project. The abovementioned outline on this subject can be useful to any division of such projects as the same will give some general idea on the process of document control.

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