

Q & A about QA/QM

October 2010

Subject of Nonconformity Control

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Question:

Some people are insisting that the nonconformity identified at the internal audits shall be the subject of the Control of Nonconforming Products. Also, there are such people that say the NCR has to be issued against the employee who caused the nonconformity to initiate disciplinary action to them. Are they right and can this be allowed to be the company culture? (From a Member of ASQ)

See next page for our response.

Answer:

Nonconforming products identified in day-to-day production and inspection activities must be reported to the Management Representative with the Nonconformity Report (NCR) for his instruction for disposition. The nonconformities identified as a result of auditing are mostly those of management system and called “audit findings”. They are different from product nonconformities, and must be reported to the audit client, and Corrective Action Request must be issued to the manager of the responsible function.

Each individual nonconforming product must be identified and segregated, so that it cannot be commingled with conforming products and cannot be used in the final product. You have to make disposition of all of them as soon as possible. This is the objective of Nonconformity Control.

The NCR must contain all such data as who found the NC, where, when, and how it is nonconforming. After fixing or disposing of all NCs, you should analyze all NCRs for each type of them, to determine their root causes. It will lead you to corrective action to eliminate or reduce the similar type of NCs.

It seems that top management people of many companies believe all errors and nonconformities are caused by the individual hence only disciplinary action is needed. If they believe so, they are wrong. Also, it is usually wrong to issue the NCR against the individual.

Before going to blaming the employee for his error, you have to examine whether your operation procedures are good enough and user-friendly. If not, you have to correct them.

By the way, training and disciplinary action are merely a type of remedial action, and cannot be considered to be good corrective action because there is no guarantee that we can prevent recurrence of the same, similar or associated problems.

Akio Miura, ASQ CQA/CQE/CMQOE/CRE/CBA/CHA/CSSBB