

Definition & Guidelines for Corrective and Preventive Actions

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# Corrective Actions

A corrective action is a term that encompasses the process of reacting to product problems, customer complaints or other nonconformities and fixing them. The process includes:

* Reviewing and defining the problem or nonconformity
* Finding the cause of the problem
* Developing an action plan to correct the problem and prevent a recurrence
* Implementing the plan
* Evaluating the effectiveness of the correction.

# Preventive Actions

A preventive action is a process for detecting potential problems or nonconformance’s and eliminating them. The process includes:

* Identify the potential problem or nonconformance
* Find the cause of the potential problem
* Develop a plan to prevent the occurrence.
* Implement the plan
* Review the actions taken and the effectiveness in preventing the problem.

# Differences between Corrective and Preventive Actions

The process used for corrective actions and preventive actions is very similar and the steps outlined in this document can be used for either. However, it is important to understand the differences and also be aware of the implications involved in performing and documenting each.

A corrective action is a reaction to a problem that has already occurred. It assumes that a nonconformance or problem exists and has been reported by either internal or external sources. The actions initiated are intended to: a) fix the problem and b) modify the quality system so that the process that caused it is monitored to prevent a reoccurrence. The documentation for a corrective action provides evidence that the problem was recognized, corrected, and proper controls installed to make sure that it does not happen again.

For example, in a manufacturing setting, a large batch of subassemblies produced four weeks ago was found to be out of specification when received for final product assembly. In this situation a problem exists and has been identified. A corrective action must be implemented to avoid production delays and a possible financial impact on the company.

A preventive action is initiated to stop a potential problem from occurring. It assumes that adequate monitoring and controls are in place in the quality system to assure that potential problems are identified and eliminated before they happen. If something in the quality system indicates that a possible problem is or may develop, a preventive action must be implemented to avert and then eliminate the potential situation. The documentation for a preventive action provides evidence that an effective quality system has been implemented that is able to anticipate, identify and eliminate potential problems.

For example, Statistical Process Control has shown that over a period of several weeks a machining process has slowly but consistently trended toward the upper control limit. This situation would likely require a preventive action to assure that the process does not get out of control resulting in scrap and/or defective parts and, again, a possible financial impact on the company.

A timely, well documented, Corrective / Preventive Action program validates a quality system that is not only capable of identifying potential problems but also effectively correcting them when they do occur.