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CREATING A WORD LIST FOR TECHNICAL AND CLERICAL PERSONNEL

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CREATING A WORD LIST FOR TECHNICAL AND CLERICAL PERSONNEL

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The Savannah River Plant and Laboratory employ more than 16,000 people. When the separate Publications Divisions of the Plant and Laboratory were combined, it became obvious that no single standard existed for the many unique and highly technical terms and abbreviations used by site personnel. It was determined that a single source of information for using terms was needed, and that the source would take the form of a word list. After months of compiling and evaluating items for inclusion, the Word List was finally issued to more than 5000 employees onsite. In addition, the Word List is being added to the site computer network as a reference document and as an online spelling checker where more than 2000 employees will have access to it through their personal computers.

BACKGROUND

At the Savannah River Site, nuclear materials are produced for the nation's defense program. The 300-square-mile reservation, located near Aiken, South Carolina, is run for the Department of Energy by E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Company (Du Pont). The site contains numerous production and research facilities and employs more than 16,000 people. Many of the processes and facilities are highly technical and unique to the site; thus a unique technical vocabulary has evolved.

The two principle organizations onsite are the Savannah River Plant (SRP) and the Savannah River Laboratory (SRL), both run by Du Pont. SRP has the responsibility for carrying out materials production and site administration, while SRL supports the operations of SRP with a number of research and development programs. Plant and Laboratory personnel generate various technical documents such as reports, operating procedures, and manuals, and many submit articles for publication in professional journals or conference proceedings.

Previously, SRP and SRL organizations were each serviced by their own Publications Divisions (PD's), each with its own guidelines and standards. In 1983, the separate PD's were combined and a well-known but rarely mentioned problem became evident; the two PD's had functioned with different standards for the same site vocabulary. The separate PD's had also influenced the employees that used their respective services in such a way that Plant and Laboratory documents were distinguishable just by looking at the way a word such as "pipette" was spelled or how terms like "buckling" or "billion" were abbreviated. It was apparent that words used in site documents needed to be standardized in both use and spelling so that clarity and consistency would exist between organizations of SRP and SRL; also, many site authors present and publish papers in groups, where standardized language helps present a consistent appearance to work performed at the site. There was also a lack of any single reference source for clerical personnel (mainly typists) that provided access to the various terms and abbreviations common to the nuclear industry. The standard had to be developed in a way that would ensure its acceptance and use by personnel from both the Plant and Laboratory who had become accustomed to individual practices. The current editorial staff chose the format of a word list, to be used by professionals onsite who generate the information and by the clerical personnel who help to produce the final documents. The format of a word list was chosen because it is flexible enough to accommodate as much detail for each entry as deemed necessary. The word list format also provides a medium for including expanded usage notes on particularly troublesome words and terms until a style guide can be developed.

CREATING THE WORD LIST

Once the job of producing a Word List was accepted, three steps were planned as generalizations of the necessary tasks: compilation, evaluation, and standardization.

Compilation

The compilation effort involved the systematic gathering of terms used onsite and in the nuclear industry. There were two primary sources of terms. One was the previous lists used by the former PD's (both former PD's had compiled lists of words and abbreviations used onsite, but neither of these guides had been updated for more than eight years). However, both of these lists gave virtually opposite standards for conventions where a

choice existed. The second source was a manual search of inhouse technical documents as they were processed by the current PD editorial staff.

Once a fairly large list of terms was compiled, it was circulated among selected representatives of various technical organizations and clerical personnel to solicit input from their areas of expertise. In this way we hoped to sample the various professional journals by seeking the input of readers familiar with those journals. At the same time we hoped that clerical personnel would help us avoid the "my readers will know what I'm saying" syndrome (which, like a coded message, has often allowed jargon to inhibit the free flow of scientific and technical information at the site by rendering it inaccessible to all but the jargoned few). The point of this review was to find out what words, abbreviations, and conventions the various scientific journals were using and to gain some insight as to their audience specificity.

Evaluation

When the input was received from the field, decisions were made concerning the necessity of including each term, determining a single use or spelling where multiple choice existed, and deciding whether a definition was necessary or just a simple show of spelling. Many expanded usage notes were also considered at this point. These usage notes, which help clarify differences between words and set forth usage standards, are inserted alphabetically in the list and are cross-referenced to other entries where necessary.

The editorial staff, after evaluating the evidence from the field, served as judge, jury, and hangman in all these decisions. The first decision made was that any term previously accepted by the original PD's would be included (excluding aspects of style or usage) even if it was obsolete. Obsolete terms were included to provide an historical record, because some documents onsite date to the time of plant startup in the early 1950s. All obsolete terms were noted as such and, where practicable, new or alternative terms were referenced. Other terms, which had been gleaned from site documents and the input of field experts, were evaluated to determine if they were author- or site-specific entries that were of value to technical or clerical personnel onsite. To do this, the steadily growing list was circulated among the editorial staff to gain their insight into each term. Terms whose value was questionable were deliberately searched for in technical documents which were processed through the editing group. In many instances, it was necessary to check terms for status as trademarks because many trademarks inadvertently become generic terms at the site. This procedure was accomplished on our Technical Library's computer, which subscribes to a trademark database, and by manually searching the 21-volume *Thomas Register* of trademarks and tradenames.

Standardization

The first two steps of compiling and evaluating the information were straightforward tasks with a rational set of guidelines to follow. Then came the attempt to standardize the style and usage of the terms in our list. Issues of style often avoid the constraints of rational thought, and our task was no exception. Style was a more passionate subject, consisting mostly of "well, the way we've always done it is..." The differentiation of the previous PD's didn't contribute to any harmony either. To resolve these issues, the entire editorial staff was assembled, nearly equally representing those associated with the two previous PD's. After many heated discussions and various justifications, the issue was settled by the agreement to use a simple disclaimer:

The Word List makes *recommendations* to promote consistency at SRP/SRL. Many recommendations are based upon arbitrary decisions of a preferred usage where several acceptable possibilities exist. The idea is to promote consistency.

The intent of the disclaimer was to assure all involved that the list didn't disagree with the way they had been doing things (which might have alienated many from using the list), but that their's just weren't the preferences chosen. A statement was also printed that invited comments on the list. In this way we hoped to diffuse any resentment toward the list by making it seem less pedantic. The majority of comments submitted have been of a positive tone, contributing additions or asking questions.

Production

The Word List was created entirely on the Macintosh personal computer. The process of compilation and revision is also managed on the Macintosh by keeping a master file for all changes to the list. For ease of use with page layout software, the list is organized as a series of information group folders (e.g., abbreviations, terms, typist's guides). Each folder is further divided alphabetically into files.

FUTURE USE

Accessibility

The future of the Word List will be one of expanded use and content. The original printing was distributed to nearly 5000 employees. To further the use of the communication policy set forth in the Word List, a concentrated effort is being undertaken to increase the accessibility of the list. This task involves yearly revisions to the list and distributing copies to all new clerical employees. One way to ensure that all new clerical employees receive the list has been to include it

in the multi-document Clerical Manual, which is distributed to all clerical personnel as both a training and reference source.

Computerization

The Word List is being placed on the All-in-One service of the site computer network (All-in-One is an electronic office communication system that provides services such as electronic mail, document transfer, and database management to users of the sitewide network) where it will be available to more than 2000 site network users as both a reference document and as an online spelling checker dictionary. A Hypercard stack for the Macintosh has been created for the Word List. This stack is formatted to closely resemble the printed version. Information can be accessed by clicking on tabs that organize the information or by using a finder function which searches for an item as it is being typed. Computerization enables users to have immediate online access to current and future versions of the Word List, while allowing the Publications Division to retain complete control of the revision process.

CONCLUSION

The creation of the Word List has allowed the site to generate documents that are consistent in their treatment of the spelling, abbreviation, and usage of many unique technical terms at the Savannah River Site. It has also provided typists and authors with an easily accessible source of abbreviations and terms for cutting through to the meaning behind the jargon. Pending the issuance of a style guide (now in preparation), the Word List is the single, most effective source of guidance on matters of style and usage at the site.

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