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How to Run an Effective Maintenance Control Meeting to Reduce Mishaps

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Maintenance meetings are crucial for establishing clear priorities and ensuring everyone is on the same page for the shift being covered. The meetings also set the tone as to how the shift will run that day or night. Maintenance controllers must place due diligence and priority on preparing for and executing an effective maintenance meeting.

The maintenance controller running the meeting must show up early enough to look through all Aircraft Discrepancy Books and ALSS gear for the scheduled flight personnel and Outstanding Transaction Reports (OTRs) to ensure the shops have all the gear they need and that it is ready for use.

The maintenance controller must also read through the prior shift's pass down. The pass down must still be written in a log even if it is conducted face-to-face. The lack of a thorough and clearly understood pass down will negatively affect the maintenance meeting and could lead to mistakes and possible rework. Good pass downs are essential!

When controllers start their meetings, they must get the number of workers, collateral duty inspectors (CDIs) or quality assurance representatives (CDQARs) and plane captains from each shop. Collecting these numbers allows the maintenance leaders to know who may need help and if a shop is able to assist other shops during the day. The maintenance leader should also get the status of essential ground support equipment (GSE) such as tow tractors, hydraulic test stands and electrical power carts. This includes the number of GSE pieces required and if they are ready for issue / ready for use.

After the controller gets the numbers from the shops, the maintenance control leader should ask for all the non-aircraft notes that need to be discussed. Non-aircraft notes should be covered first because once you start talking about aircraft, the maintenance control lead will want to get the team focused on working the aircraft. With all the other requirements technicians and supervisors have during their day, distractions from maintenance may often lead to risks and safety concerns.

At this point, the meeting should only focus on the aircraft and activities required for the mission. The maintenance controller should talk through the flight schedule, covering key items such as event, launch time, aircraft side number, hot pumps and crew swaps. All of the administrative notes contained within the schedule should have already been discussed.

Since everyone uses their workload report throughout the day, controllers and supervisors should be using pencils and highlighters to make notes on the workload to prioritize things that must happen. The "working" workload report is the best tool controllers and work center supervisors have at their disposal to ensure maintenance is conducted efficiently.

Maintenance controllers should review and discuss all the aircraft requirements, to include parts that must be ordered, gripes that can be fixed and the plan for cross-work center jobs. All high-risk jobs, such as jacking or moving aircraft, moving support equipment within the safety diamond and applying electrical or hydraulic power to an aircraft should be discussed in-depth to ensure all risks have been identified and mitigated.

At the end of the meeting, after all the aircraft have been covered, the maintenance controller in charge should always ask if there are things that the supervisors want to prioritize that weren't discussed. This will help get the supervisors' and work center representatives' buy-in on the maintenance controller's plan. Ensure the plan is executable within the constraints of the day. If time is a limitation, modify the plan to ensure there is enough time built in the plan to complete the tasks per the guiding instructions. The plan must be realistic and sustainable.

Once the work center supervisors state what they want to work on, re-address risk management once again. Maintenance control leaders should make it clear that supervisors or a suitable alternate should inform them immediately if anything changes with the established plan. All proposed changes must be discussed in maintenance control before changing the plans on their own. This is to ensure all risks are considered and mitigated and the impacts to other work centers are understood. Developing new plans or modifying an old plan must be a joint effort between the work centers and maintenance control, but in the end, maintenance control is responsible for the final decision.

The last thing that should be covered before letting the supervisors and work center representatives return to work is to remind them to discuss and practice good risk management during their shift. It is paramount that these principles remain in the unit's thought process, especially if the unit only has the resources (time, people, parts) to do tasks correctly the first time.

Khaki leadership should be walking through the shops after the maintenance meeting to ensure all the information discussed at the meeting is passed down to all the troops in the shop.

Remember, as a maintenance professional, always be as transparent as possible with the maintenance workforce team. An aviation squadron has many moving parts and things change quickly. Schedule changes will often affect the schedules of all squadron personnel as well as their personal lives. As soon as maintenance control leaders hear something is changing and it is verified to be true, they should inform everyone else so they can adjust their personnel schedules and plan accordingly.

Lastly, maintenance controllers must ensure that they are approachable while working behind the maintenance control desk so people aren't hesitant to inform maintenance control when things are unsafe, maintenance will take longer than expected or plans need to change to ensure work conditions remain safe. Great maintenance leaders should always welcome the supervisors' and technicians' input to ensure the maintenance effort is happening as safely and efficiently as possible.