


COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY



As the Resource Conservation Manager, your most important job is to communicate. You will investigate, coordinate and motivate. These actions require you to ask questions, explain what you learn and encourage others to act. This guidebook is a tool kit to ensure the success of your RCM program. Communication is the tool you will use most often.

A lot of your time will be spent requesting data, investigating problems, discussing ideas and reporting results. Among the most important discussions you will have will be presenting reports to those who have the authority to make decisions supporting efficiency efforts.

To make the most of any presentation, you must develop an effective communication strategy. As part of this strategy you should:

- **Know your information**
- **Know your audience**
- **Choose the best communication method**
- **Make your point clearly and simply**



➤ **Know Your Information**

Gathering information effectively requires that you know what questions to ask and what information is useful. Before visiting administrators, building staff or occupants be sure you have researched what is already available to you. Don't be afraid to ask questions. There are no "stupid" questions. What you learn might be the solution to a complex problem.

You will make presentations to general audiences with wide interests as well as to specific groups with limited interests. For general audiences, such as an assembly or public presentation, you should be prepared to present your topic in several different ways. For example, use anecdotes, pictures, charts and tables to engage the attention of different listeners. With a group such as a budget council, however, it may be sufficient to present your topic with spreadsheets and only a few graphs. Be prepared in either case to explain details beyond your presentation material such as the source of the data, the assumptions used for projections and the broad impacts of recommended actions. Being prepared will save time and enhance your credibility.


➤ **Know Your Audience**

One role of the Resource Conservation Manager is to enlist the support of facility operators and occupants to do what they can to reduce resource use. You can inform and motivate them with regular reporting and timely presentations. The presentations may be aimed at changing usage, improving operating habits, or examining proposed efficiency projects. In any case, you must tailor the presentation to the needs, abilities and responsibilities of the audience.




See **Chapter 2, Task 6** for more information on different audience groups.


Audiences will fall into three general categories: administration, facility operators and building occupants. Different audiences have different needs:



The administrative audience includes policy and budget decision makers. It may be a single person, such as a director, manager, or superintendent, or a group of people, such as a school board or city council. Administrators need more big-picture information. If they are asked to decide on a general policy issue or make a budget change, they need to be shown the reason for the change and its potential impacts and benefits. They may also be interested in the publicity aspect of their decision, so be prepared to offer suggestions.



Facility operators are usually custodians and/or facilities maintenance staff. In some cases, a designated occupant of the building may be authorized to make minor operational changes such as changing thermostat settings, replacing burned-out lamps or calling for extra trash pickup. Inform facility operators about the building's operating characteristics, how current resource use compares to some period in the past, and how it compares to other buildings of similar size and use. This information allows them to monitor their efficiency gains, develop more efficient operating schedules and target possible improvement projects.



A presentation to building occupants will focus more on the effect of their day-to-day usage habits than on the building's operating systems. This group needs to be aware of how they can directly affect resource expenditures. A facility-level RCM team should receive information that allows occupants to decide how to support the RCM program goals. You should pay particular attention to this audience because changing habits is more difficult and less permanent than changing hardware or policy. Frequent progress updates, reminders, recognition and encouragement will be a part of your communications efforts.



Choose the Best Communication Method

Regular monthly and annual reports are very effective, yet formal, communication methods. Other, more informal means of communication can also enhance the RCM program. For example, a simple congratulatory note may be appropriate to accompany a recognition award. A memo with specific suggestions for facility operators to consider for shutdown procedures may be more appropriate than calling them into a meeting, away from their work. Notices on bulletin boards in hallways and lunch rooms work especially well.

Never underestimate the value of face-to-face communication. Meeting a custodial crew as they begin their evening's work gives them an opportunity to show you how things look from their perspective. Their input is frequently overlooked and it can be extremely valuable to the RCM program. When you meet with them on their own "turf," they can often discuss or demonstrate something that cannot be carried into a meeting. This can save time and avoid misunderstandings. It is also a good opportunity for you to focus on people and issues needing attention.

You will demonstrate credibility and reliability by keeping participants updated on how resource conservation is progressing in the organization. Plan to attend organizational board or staff meetings at least twice a year. Presentations to local government councils, school boards, student councils and governing bodies of special interest groups are certainly appropriate, especially if you are invited to return for regular updates.

How you communicate is as important as what you communicate. Keep looking for better, more effective ways to deliver information and persuade your audiences.



Make Your Point Clearly and Simply

When you make a presentation to any audience, it should be focused and easy to understand. If an action or a decision is the desired result, clearly state this and present enough information to justify the action or decision. Do not waste time or distract your audience with unrelated information or unfounded speculation.

An old axiom of public speakers says "Tell them what you are going to say, tell them, then tell them what you told them." The same could apply in this case. In a presentation, summarize the problem and the desired result. Focus all supporting information (reports, charts, etc.) on the problem and its proposed solution. At the end, restate the desired result with an explanation of how it will solve the existing problem. This is a simple, but very effective method of communication.