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MEP MSI Helps Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Live Lean

Lean Manufacturing Initiatives Helps Shipyard Repair and Return Submarines to Fleet Faster

Kittery, ME – Whether you’re dropping off your car at the repair shop for maintenance or a routine oil change, you hope to have the work done quickly, cheaply and the right way. When the United States Navy sends one of its nuclear-powered submarines to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, for maintenance or modernization the Navy expects a high quality product to be returned to the Fleet on or before scheduled delivery and at the lowest cost consistent with quality. The Shipyard’s performance on submarine maintenance and modernization—the Shipyard’s “product line”—directly impacts Fleet readiness and our nation’s defense.

That’s why the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and other public as well as private shipyards have implemented Lean Manufacturing techniques into the important task of keeping the Navy’s nuclear-powered submarine fleet the best in the world. Stripped to its essentials, Lean Manufacturing uses simple but effective methods to identify and reduce waste and inventories, clear shop floors, and streamline production processes—with the overall goal of decreasing costs and increasing productivity.

The Shipyard’s Lean Office contracted with the Manufacturing Extension Partnership Management Services, Inc. (MEP MSI) to consult on training for the Shipyard’s work force in the continuous improvement techniques that embody Lean Manufacturing.

“When the Navy sends us a submarine for modernization, the Navy gives us 13 months to perform our work, but our goal is to deliver the submarine back to the Fleet in 11 months,” said Harvey Horn, assistant head of the Shipyard’s Lean Office. “Our Shipyard team works with MEP MSI to examine and analyze the processes of how work on a submarine is performed, and refine and optimize the Value Stream as much as possible.”

The “Value Stream” is the step-by-step process of how manufacturing and production work is accomplished. By analyzing and refining steps within the process the Shipyard identifies and eliminates extraneous or duplicative steps so work can be performed more efficiently, with resulting savings in time and costs.

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“In some ways the Shipyard is like a lot of other manufacturing facilities, but instead of the product moving past workers in a shop or on an assembly line, the Shipyard’s workers go down into the submarine which is their product,” said John DuBois, MEP MSI vice-president for advanced resource development. “When we started working with the Shipyard we sat down with management to define the Shipyard’s core product—essentially what the Shipyard’s workers do to maintain or modernize a submarine. The answer is that the Shipyard’s core product is not the submarine itself, but the process of executing complex tasks on thousands of submarine components.”

The Shipyard and MEP MSI have identified different work areas and locations throughout the processes of maintaining and modernizing submarines, and assigned teams to assess how Lean Manufacturing can be implemented in work areas and the processes themselves. One of the goals of DuBois and his team is to facilitate and provide continuity between the various Lean Manufacturing teams and identify how the individual processes—like the individual pieces of a puzzle—join to complete the puzzle. This facilitation has produced Lean Manufacturing implementation successes in several areas of the Shipyard—on and off the submarines. Both Horn’s and DuBois’ teams are working to train all 4,300 Shipyard employees in Lean Manufacturing techniques.

“Portsmouth Naval Shipyard has consistently returned submarines to the Fleet ahead of schedule and below budgeted costs,” said DuBois. “Shipyard employees recognize that continuous improvement of what is already high quality work has a positive effect on them, their core product, how their work relates to work performed by other naval industrial facilities—and ultimately the vital role the submarine fleet plays in our nation’s defense.”

MEP MSI is a management consulting firm providing supply chain solutions to manufacturers across a wide range of industries throughout the United States. The mission of MEP MSI and its state affiliates is to assist both small and medium manufacturing enterprises (SMEs) and larger prime contractors and original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) develop effective supply chains. Supply chain improvement reduces cost and lead-time while increasing profitability and quality. For more information, please visit www.mepmsi.org or phone 1-207-623-0680.

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