

# Standard Operating Procedures; aka “SOP”

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In this article I would like to encourage you to consider creating and maintaining a Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) document. Many times systems experience the loss of an operator for one reason or another that has been employed by the system for some time. No one knows the system better than the operator. Especially in our smaller systems without an SOP their knowledge and the investment that the community has made in that operator may be lost. The new operator has to start from scratch. It takes a considerable amount of time and expense to get everything back up to speed and in compliance. An SOP can be as simple as what you do daily, weekly, monthly, annually, per permit period, etc. Not just what you do but also how you do it. It would be a great idea in some instances to video a procedure. An SOP needs to be specific to the system and it is a living document.

I've heard the arguments against doing an SOP including: I had to figure it out by myself; no one helped me; job security/turf protection; I'd be training my replacement so that it would be easier to eliminate me (I've seen that happen by the way); if I varied from the SOP then I would be liable, etc.

EPA doesn't understand not having an SOP. Tribal systems as sovereign nations answer directly to EPA and I've been told that they have SOP's for virtually everything.

If you are concerned about personal liabilities then you might call it “Suggested or Normal Operating Procedures.” You might include a disclaimer at the end authorizing the operator to vary from the SOP as deemed necessary by the operator at the time.

You may decide that in your particular situation that you prefer not to do an SOP. However, if you want to do one NeRWA stands ready to assist you. What greater legacy could you leave the community to which you have dedicated your years of service.