



## **STYLE GUIDELINES FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH DOCUMENTS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Style for welding and cutting documents means two things: matter and manner; form and content; style and format. Style refers not only to what is said, but also how it is stated and presented to the reader.

### **EARLY STYLE METHODS AND FEATURES**

The style and format for welding and cutting documents have evolved with time. Ten or fifteen years ago documents contained the following features:

- Commands or directives telling what to do without explaining the consequences of not doing it.
- Frequent use of the passive voice rather than active voice.
- Use of underlining for emphasis.

### **EARLY STYLE EXAMPLES**

- “A check off list should be used by the welding operator.”
- “Proper quality control procedures should be used.”

### **REASONS FOR NOT USING EARLY STYLE**

The AWS Safety and Health Committee recommends the early method not be used for the following reasons:

- The older style of writing does not give or imply the consequences of the failure to act as directed.
- The older style does not tell how to avoid the consequences when it is possible to do so.

## CURRENT STYLE METHODS AND FEATURES

Currently, it is recommended that documents state the hazards and include the consequences as well as how to avoid them. The stylistic features are as follows:

- Use the active voice.
- Use strong, clear, action verbs in the imperative mood.
- Use short, direct sentences.

## USE OF PRECAUTIONARY LABELING SIGNAL WORDS

There are three signal words used to identify the levels of hazard in ANSI Z535.4—DANGER, WARNING, and CAUTION. Wherever possible, reserve these words for use on labels only. Avoid the use of signal words in prose. Use the word “precautionary” instead of signal words for text.

## CURRENT STYLE EXAMPLES

- “Use a checklist. Do not skip any items. Omitting steps can cause personal injury or equipment damage.”
- “Use proper quality control procedures to meet intended performance requirements and to minimize costs.”

## BACKGROUND OF CURRENT STYLE

The current writing style evolves from precautionary labeling practices and arises from the obligation to users found in standards and codes, as well as from an industry-wide concern for the well-being of its customers. The writing method needs to **warn and instruct** the reader about the **normal use and reasonably foreseeable misuse and abuse** of a product or process as is used in current precautionary labeling practices. The instruction literature which accompanies a product, or process, is considered as part of that practice.

- The **warn** part of the requirement is met by a statement of the hazard and consequences of the failure to act as specified.
- The **instruct** part of the requirement is met by explaining how to avoid the hazard and consequences.

- It is not mandatory to have a particular order to the statements. It can be **warn and instruct** or **instruct and warn**. Either sequence is satisfactory, though **warn and instruct** is preferred.
- This order preference is based on current precautionary labeling practices which warn first and instruct second.
- For all safety and health information published by the American Welding Society, try to follow the **warn and instruct** requirements for the **normal use** as well as for the **foreseeable misuse and abuse** of the product or process.

## FORMAT SUGGESTIONS

- Several formats satisfy these requirements. The two most popular are the following:
- Put all information in one or two sentences.
- Use an entry statement containing the warning (statement of hazard and its consequences) followed by a list of simple instructions telling how to avoid the hazard like the following typical example from NEMA EW6:

**WARNING:** ELECTRIC SHOCK can kill:

FUMES AND GASES can be hazardous;

ARC RAYS can injure eyes and burn skin.

- Do not touch live electrical parts.
- Keep your head out of the fumes.
- Wear dry insulating gloves and clothing.
- Use enough ventilation or exhaust at the arc to keep fumes and gases from your breathing zone, and the general area.
- Wear correct eye, ear, and body protection.
- Read and follow the manufacturer's instructions, employer's safety practices, and Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs).

## FEATURES OF THE CURRENT METHOD

- Use simple, clear, precise words.
- Use the active voice instead of the passive voice in sentence structure.
- Use the imperative mood of the verbs to give commands or directives.

## SUMMARY

Remember the primary purpose of any instructions, but especially those containing safety or health information;

- Quickly get to the point to keep the reader's attention and save time.
- Be clear, direct, and simple in communicating all the reader needs to know.
- Use easy-to-read short lists to follow the preferred method.

## INFORMATION SOURCES

National Electrical Manufacturer's Association, *Guidelines for Precautionary Labeling for Arc Welding and Cutting Products*, EW6. Washington, DC: National Electrical Manufacturer's Association.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Manual for NEMA Standards Publications*, NEMA NS 1-1983. Washington, DC: National Electrical Manufacturer's Association.

American National Standards Institute (ANSI). *Style Manual for Preparation of Proposed American National Standards*, ANSI X3/90-1887 X,S,M,T, available from American National Standards Institute, 11 West 42nd Street, New York, NY 10036.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Product Safety Signs and Labels*, ANSI Z535.4, available from American National Standards Institute, 11 West 42nd Street, New York, NY 10036.