

# 3S: Sort, Sweep, and Standardize

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## Getting Back to Basics

If you're on the manufacturing side of the hearth industry, you may have heard whispers about 5S, 6S, or even the mythical 7S.

Forget all that noise.

Let's get back to basics with 3S: Sort, Sweep, and Standardize.

You might think this system is just for manufacturing nerds, but hold onto your hats—because 3S isn't just for fireplace factories. In fact, it can improve nearly every area of a retail hearth business—from the showroom to the warehouse and everything in between.

So let's dive deep into the world of 3S—the trio that can turn your grounds and warehouse team into a lean, mean productivity machine.

## STEP 1

First things first: Get rid of the junk.

This applies to every part of your business—but especially your grounds, warehouse, and trucks.

Clutter kills efficiency. The more unnecessary tools, parts, and paperwork lying around, the harder it is to find what you actually need.

Think of this as Marie Kondo-ing your business—but instead of sparking joy, you're sparking productivity.

**"CLUTTER KILLS EFFICIENCY."**

# STEP 2

Next up, it's time to sweep.

But this isn't just about making things look pretty.

When I say "sweep," I mean "clean to inspect."

You're looking for problems, not just dust bunnies.

## The Why

A clean workspace isn't just about aesthetics. It's about spotting issues before they become big problems.

- **Messy Showrooms = Lost Sales:** Dusty displays, misplaced products, or cluttered walkways make customers feel like your business is disorganized—and they'll take their money elsewhere.
- **Dirty Warehouses = Safety Hazards:** Spilled oil, loose screws, or scattered packing materials can lead to accidents.
- **Disorganized Trucks = Wasted Time:** If your crew is digging through garbage to find the right tool, you're losing money by the minute.

When you and your team sweep to inspect, you're spotting small issues before they cause big delays.

## The How

Pick a workspace and clean every nook and cranny. As you do, look for anything that's out of place, damaged, or just plain weird.

- **Deep Clean and Organize:** Clear debris, return tools, organize boxes, and check under shelves for hidden junk or potential hazards.
- **Inspect for Issues:** Identify anything that's misplaced, broken, inefficient, or obsolete.

By the time you're done, you'll have a safer, more efficient workspace—and you'll catch problems before they become expensive headaches.

## The Why

A disorganized space wastes time and money. Here's how clutter hurts your business:

- **Messy Workspaces = Slower Workflows:** When employees have to search for parts, step over junk, or dig through piles of paperwork, it slows down their ability to get stuff done.
- **Cluttered Storage = More Mistakes:** A disorganized environment makes it easier to grab the wrong part, misplace orders, or lose track of inventory.
- **Overloaded Areas = Wasted Labor:** Employees who spend extra time looking for tools or materials aren't focused on completing jobs—leading to lost productivity.

By eliminating clutter, you'll streamline operations, reduce frustration, and improve profitability.

## The How

Start with one area—a workbench in the warehouse, a shelf in the showroom, or the back of a service truck. Go through each item in the area and ask, "Do I need this to do my job?" Then:

- **Remove Unnecessary Items:** If you don't need something, trash it, recycle it, or donate it.
- **Organize the Essentials:** If you do need something, store it where it's easy to grab when needed.

By sorting regularly, you'll speed up your workflow, cut down on frustration, and reduce costly mistakes—which means fewer delays, smoother installs, and a more profitable business.

**“WITHOUT A SYSTEM IN PLACE,  
ALL THAT SORTING AND SWEEPING  
WILL BE WASTED EFFORT.”**

## STEP 3

without a system in place, all that sorting and sweeping will be wasted effort.

This step is where the magic happens.

Standardizing means creating clear systems and processes to keep your grounds, warehouse, and trucks organized for the long haul.

### The Why

Without clear standards, you'll end up right back where you started—buried under a mountain of stuff.

- **Cluttered Showrooms = Overwhelmed Customers:** If customers can't navigate the space easily, find product information quickly, or see displays clearly, they'll get confused and move on.
- **Disorganized Warehouses = Delayed Jobs:** If your team doesn't know where to find parts or tools, they waste valuable time searching instead of working.
- **Messy Trucks = Wasted Money:** A truck packed with random, untracked inventory leads to lost tools, double orders, and wasted fuel on extra trips.

When you standardize your workspaces, you

remove the guesswork and make sure everything stays exactly where it should be.

### The How

Standardization isn't just about keeping things neat. It's about creating a place for everything and ensuring everything stays in its place.

- **Create Dedicated Storage Areas:** Set specific locations for tools, parts, and paperwork in your warehouse, showroom, and trucks.
- **Label Everything Clearly:** Use color coding, bin numbers, or shelving markers so everyone—from veteran techs to new hires—can instantly find what they need.
- **Use Visual Cues:** Mark outlines on the floor, use shadow boards for tools, and create checklists for inventory tracking to effortlessly maintain order.
- **Make It Idiot-Proof:** If someone new joins your team tomorrow, that hire should instantly know where everything belongs—without having to ask.

By standardizing your systems for organization, you ensure that your business stays efficient, your team works faster, and your mistakes shrink to a minimum.



## 3S in the Physical World

When you think of 3S, your first thought might be keeping the warehouse neat—but it goes far beyond that. From parking lots to toolboxes, 3S ensures that everything is in its place, easy to find, and ready for use.

That said, here are some simple ways you could apply 3S to your grounds, warehouse, and trucks.

### Sort: Clear Out the Clutter

- Grounds: Get rid of old promotional signs, broken fixtures, and junk that makes your business look neglected.
- Warehouse: Remove outdated inventory, unnecessary tools, and obsolete parts that take up valuable space.
- Trucks: Only carry what's needed for scheduled jobs—reduce excess weight and keep things organized.

### Sweep: Organize and Optimize

- Grounds: Regularly sweep parking lots, clear walkways, and inspect signage for wear and tear.
- Warehouse: Clean under shelves, clear workstations, and check for leaks, broken items, or misplaced inventory.
- Trucks: Keep trucks tidy and stocked, ensuring everything's always ready for the next job.

### Standardize: Make It Stick

- Grounds: Assign maintenance tasks to a schedule so the property always looks professional.
- Warehouse: Label storage shelves, implement a consistent bin system, and create a visual map of where key inventory items are located.
- Trucks: Establish a standard loadout process for trucks with pre-made pallets that include all the tools and parts for the current job.

By applying 3S across all areas of your business, you eliminate inefficiencies, reduce safety risks, and ensure every team member can work at peak performance.

## 3S in the Digital World

Of course, organization doesn't stop with physical spaces. Your digital systems also need structure.

Given that, here's how you can use the 3S framework to improve your inventory management, scheduling systems, and digital workspaces.

### Sort: Clear Out the Clutter

- Inventory Management: Review current inventory lists and eliminate outdated or duplicate SKUs.
- Scheduling Systems: Remove unnecessary tasks, outdated job orders, and duplicate calendar entries.
- Digital Workspaces: Delete old estimates, unused spreadsheets, and redundant emails that clutter shared drives.

### Sweep: Organize and Optimize

- Inventory Management: Clean up product listings, ensure accurate stock levels, and set deadlines for discontinued items.
- Scheduling Systems: Adjust job orders and appointment schedules based on real-time availability.
- Digital Workspaces: Create clearly labeled folders with consistent naming conventions for estimates, invoices, and contracts.

### Standardize: Make It Stick

- Inventory Management: Implement a standardized SKU system to prevent errors, duplicates, or miscounts.
- Scheduling Systems: Set clear rules for job bookings, ensuring crews have the right time and correct tools for each install.
- Digital Workspaces: Use a shared, standardized system to keep everything accessible and organized.

With so much of your business relying on digital tools, cluttered systems can be just as damaging as a messy warehouse. Applying 3S to your digital world ensures everything is accessible, updated, and streamlined.

# “ It’s about building a business that runs better every day. ”

## Building a Business That Runs Better

At first, setting aside 30 minutes every morning for sorting, sweeping, and standardizing might seem unnecessary.

But in reality, you can’t afford not to.

Because unkempt grounds lead to lost sales.

Cluttered warehouses cause project delays.

And messy trucks result in return trips.

But when you start each day with 3S, you build momentum. Small improvements lead to bigger ones, creating a domino effect that transforms your entire operation. Over time, this “Improvement Momentum” makes your business more efficient, your team more proactive, and your mistakes less frequent.

That’s why companies that commit to 3S don’t just see short-term efficiency gains—they build a long-term competitive advantage. Over time, their teams work smarter, their customer service

improves, and their operational costs decrease. To see results like these—and others like them—3S can’t be a one-time effort. Instead, it has to become the way your company operates. And that’s where you come in.

As a business leader, your job isn’t just to make improvements—it’s to *improve the process of making improvements*. By implementing 3S, you’re not just organizing a workspace. You’re creating a team that takes ownership, spots problems, addresses inefficiencies, and improves operations constantly.

If you’re new to 3S, start small. Pick a cluttered corner of your warehouse and apply the 3S principles. Sort out what you don’t need, clean to inspect, and standardize the remaining items. Once you’ve done that to one corner, move on to a different area, then another—and watch your business transform over time.

Because at the end of the day, 3S isn’t just about cleaning up your grounds and warehouse—it’s about building a business that runs better every day.



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