

Library stock verification: an occupational hazard

Mrs. Haseena Begum

Librarian, Govt. First Grade College, Sulepeth. Dist: Gulbarga

ABSTRACT

Explains the sensitive controversial stock verification as one of the occupational hazards and a post mortem, emphasizes need for clarity of objectives and procedures regarding stock verification and responsibilities of loss, points out that the cost of stock verification often far exceed the benefits, highlights norms and procedures of stock verification for Government of India institutions, discusses some advantages and various methods and procedures of physical verification, put forth precautionary measures to be taken against loss and mutilation of library documents, analyses the issue of responsibility of loss and ways of resolving the conflict of responsibility, presents the procedure for write-off of reasonable loss, finally concludes by stressing the need for rational and updated rules and procedures about stock verification, responsibility of loss and limits to write-off loss as well as vital role of professional bodies in this direction.

INTRODUCTION

Stock verification or physical verification is to periodically check and account for the documents acquired by a library. Stock verification is an insignificant aspect of librarianship as far as teachers, researchers and library experts are concerned. But in practice stock verification is considered as a sensitive, controversial and unwanted evil activity. Practicing librarians are often perturbed and worried over the process of library stock verification and its results and implications. The spirit and philosophy of librarianship towards books as emotion filled animate beings dissipates when books are subjected to stock verification. As such some consider stock verification as one of the occupational hazards. The other hazards include mutilation of documents and loss in transit of supplies. Stock verification is often done like a ritual without clear identification of aims and objectives and hence a host of confusion surrounds stock verification. If the objectives and procedures of physical verification and responsibilities about loss of documents are clearly enumerated, the process becomes plain and simple.

STOCK VERIFICATION: A RITUAL/ POSTMORTEM

Often, the cost of carrying out a stock verification, particularly in a dynamic, comprehensive, well defined and compact collection like that of a special library far exceeds the benefits derived and even the loss discovered. Hence at the outset this post-mortem or futile exercise appears to have no positive benefits except accounting for the stock. On the other hand this may cause inconvenience to users, disturbance to routines of library, health hazard



to library staff, loss of man hours, time, money and service in a library. Whether to take up such an activity or not, if taken up at what frequency and is it for entire collection or for a sample collection, etc.

The major methods used for Stock Verification.

1) Accession Register - This system is very simple and accessible. In this method, the Accession Register is carried to the rack. One person speaks the Accession Number of the book on the board and another person signs the number mentioned in the Accession Register. When all the texts are checked, then the accession number which does not have a mark (Tick) is searched and if it is not found, then that book is considered lost. Although this method seems simple, it takes more time and labor because texts on shelves are classified as Call no. And the Entries of texts in the Accession Register. Occur in sequence.

2) By using a separate Register with accession number - Another method is adopted to take care of the errors of the above-mentioned method and to save the Accession Register, under this method separate- Accession No. on the pages of the Earth Register Verification is carried out in the same way as in the first method. In this method, the same defects are found which were found in the previous method. The main flaw in them is that Accession No. There is a lot of mistake in speaking and listening again and again. Sometimes if even a little attention is diverted, there are mistakes in writing the number.

3) By sheets having numbers written or printed - In this method Accession on different sheets. It is printed or written by hand. In the previous two methods, only two employees could perform the work of stock verification at the same time as only one register is available for verification. In this method, Accession No is mentioned on different sheets, so many employees can participate in this task at the same time. Access No. inscribed on the sheet Is matched with the texts available on the panels. Available accession No. is ticked on the sheet.

ADVANTAGES OF STOCK VERIFICATION

A library should also take note of some advantages in carrying out stock verification. Firstly, periodic stock verification and write-off of resultant loss helps to reduce unnecessary escalation in book value of assets. Secondly, physical verification also helps in replacing relevant, useful and on demand documents with new copies wherever lost or mutilated. Thirdly, stock verification is the time to introduce new ways of arrangement of stack, modified or new lending system and other procedures. Fourthly, if a library calls back all issued out documents for stock verification purpose, it can provide an opportunity for its users to browse the entire collection after verification. This very much counteracts the otherwise bias of less useful books lying on shelves through the year. Fifthly, stock verification helps to review the precautionary measures already taken in preventing loss and mutilation as well as to identify any deficiencies in the existing procedure of maintenance of library and vigilance. Above all, stock verification helps as a way of identifying and discarding obsolete volumes

PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES AGAINST LOSS

Having carried out stock verification in a library, the very first question to be asked is that 'are the existing precautionary measures against loss of library documents enough? and 'is there any scope to take further precautions?' (This may even be one of the objectives of the stock verification). Here again the preventive and precautionary actions normally cost much more than the value of loss. The usual precautions taken at the time of planning a library is to operate with one exit cum entrance, not allowing personal belongings inside the library and



covering all windows of the building with suitable wire mesh or metal grills to avoid passing books through windows.

RESPONSIBILITY AND WRITEOFF OF LOSS

After accepting and probably implementing wherever possible the additional precautionary measures against loss of library documents the ordeal does not end. No precautionary measure without fully undermining the service function in an open access library can ensure total elimination of loss. A negligible number of perverted, possessive, habituated persons responsible for loss and mutilation are likely to continue in spite of liberalised services and strict vigilance. Further what has already been lost and what is going to be discovered as lost in the future stock verifications need to be explained to and got write-off by the competent authority. At this stage the question of who is responsible for loss of library documents often surfaces with an indirect hint at librarian or librarian together with his staff though most of special libraries and information centres are directly or indirectly managed by non librarians either in the form of committees or as officer incharge. In some libraries, the librarian may be directly held responsible for the loss.

Loss of moveable property, stores and consumable is a universal phenomenon. Individuals, institutions, departments, public and private enterprises incur loss of many types of moveable property, stores and consumables. An individual library user, who loses a book borrowed from the library pays the 'replacement cost' to the library, rightfully and sometimes vengefully feels that what is lost by librarian should be made good by librarian. But he conveniently forgets to distinguish librarian as individual user from librarian as a functional head of the library.

CONCLUSION

Library stock verification is not just an unnecessary evil which brings very little benefit to the users and library staff but has some advantages. There are many ways of quickly and effectively completing stock verification depending on the organisation of records, magnitude of work and availability of tools and men. There are an array of precautionary measures against loss of library documents depending on the purse of the institution. But the cost of such measures often far exceed the saving they may provide to the library. The issue of fixing responsibility for loss of library documents has created an occupational hazard for librarianship. Rationalisation and updation of rules regarding stock verification and the prescribed limits regarding writeoff of the loss in service oriented libraries would go long way to provide better services to users. Particularly, the guidelines should be made more explicit about type of material to be covered (ie., only books and bound journals) for stock verification and rational about fixing the limit on the cost of the book for initiating enquiry and action. It may be reasonable to say that a book costing more than 150% of the average cost of the book acquired during the year only need to be subjected to further enquiry when it is lost. Professional bodies have a vital role to play in this regard.

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