Walt Disney World Parks & Resorts in Lake Buena Vista, Fla. is a vast amusement park offering many amenities and activities to keep visitors happy and create memorable experiences for each guest.

Gail House and Jennifer Zipeto, safety service managers with Walt Disney World, presented at Safety 2016 about the Herculean task of coordinating and implementing a 5S initiative across the park’s 46 square miles.

“The park operates just like a small city,” Zipeto said. “Any job you want to do or have an interest in, you can do at Disney.”

Behind the scenes, the park requires millions of hours of man power per week and well-oiled operations. Employees are referred to as “cast members” having a role in the show. Disney currently employs between 68,000 to 72,000 cast members and is the largest single-site employer in the state of Florida.

A letter written by Walt Disney himself laid the foundation for Walt Disney World safety managers such as House and Zipeto to implement 5S, in conjunction with what Disney refers to as the Four Keys: safety, courtesy, show and efficiency.

The process to introducing the program to Walt Disney World is close to being complete but is still ongoing. It involves numerous steps, beginning with identifying leaders to buy into the new procedures as well as training and education.

Those who are chosen as good candidates to promote 5S attend specialized two to three day sessions. They attend a brief meeting followed by a significant amount of practical, in-field experience and then work to pass on that knowledge.

“We don’t try to 5S the World in one day,” House said. “We take a concentrated look at one place and do it well.”

House specifically went into depth about how Disney maintains pristine park grounds and horticulture. The key to this, she said, is reducing clutter in behind-the-scenes areas and in landscaping trailers and optimizing the way staff parks golf carts and other vehicles – facing one direction allowing for easy access.
“It’s not like cleaning your garage or closet – it’s not that easy,” House said. “You have to think about having the right storage solutions; sometimes it’s not a box or shelf.”

Disney’s sorting process includes not only making sure everything is organized but also addresses safety regulations such as Florida’s sprinkler clearance standard. Excess inventory is often reused in a different area of the park complex or sold to cast members if it is not needed anymore, House said.

This meticulous method of organization also allows cast members to point out things such as stains, cracks or leaks.

“It helps them to really find what is causing the abnormality,” House said. “It makes problems visible and easy to count. They don’t have to search and sort.”

In addition, placing supplies in the same exact location improves efficiency and productivity and allows for equipment inspection more often. With this standardization, the implementation of best practices such as FIFO and the help of a simple safety/productivity app, Disney has been able to cut costs, House said.

There has yet to be an accurate measure as to how much 5S has exactly improved safety within Walt Disney World. While their incidents have decreased, there are too many factors to tell if it is directly correlated, House said.

However, one thing is for certain. Implementing a 5S program has bred a more efficient, productive workforce and is slowly improving Disney’s safety culture as a whole. Each cast member now knows their responsibilities, is able to find things more easily and is beginning to understand how 5S plays into Disney’s Four Keys, she said.

“We ask them if they would be proud to have their family or guest backstage,” House said. “After we put it that way, they say ‘Oh I get it’.”