

Tips for effective workplace housekeeping



To some people, the word “housekeeping” calls to mind cleaning floors and surfaces, removing dust, and organizing clutter. But in a work setting, it means much more. Housekeeping is crucial to safe workplaces.

The practice extends from traditional offices to industrial workplaces, including factories, warehouses and manufacturing plants that present special challenges such as hazardous materials, combustible dust and other flammables. Experts agree that all workplace safety programs should incorporate housekeeping, and every worker should play a part. Here are some tips for effective workplace housekeeping:

PREVENT SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS

To help prevent slip, trip and fall incidents, the Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety recommends the following:

- Report and clean up spills and leaks
- Keep aisles and exits clear of items
- Consider installing mirrors and warning signs to help with blind spots
- Replace worn, ripped or damaged flooring
- Consider installing anti-slip flooring in areas that can't always be cleaned
- Use drip pans and guards
- Eliminate slippery conditions, such as snow, ice, oil and grease, from walkways and working surfaces as necessary

ELIMINATE FIRE HAZARDS

The Supervisors' Safety Manual from the National Safety Council includes these precautionary measures for fire safety:

- Keep combustible materials in the work area only in amounts needed for the job. When they are unneeded, move them to an assigned safe storage area

- Store quick-burning, flammable materials in designated locations away from ignition sources
- Avoid contaminating clothes with flammable liquids. Change clothes if contamination occurs
- Keep passageways and fire doors free of obstructions. Stairwell doors should be kept closed. Do not store items in stairwells. Keep materials at least 18 inches away from automatic sprinklers, fire extinguishers and sprinkler controls. 18-inch distance is required, but 24 to 36 inches is recommended
- Clearance of 3 feet is required between piled material and the ceiling. If stock is piled more than 15 feet high, clearance should be doubled. See NFPA13 (2019)
- Hazards in electrical areas should be reported, and work orders should be issued to fix them

PREVENT FALLING OBJECTS

Recognizing existing and potential hazards and developing safe habits will help create a safer, more productive work environment:

- Shut file cabinet drawers when not in use
- Open one filing cabinet drawer at a time to prevent a tip-over
- Store heavy objects close to the floor and out of walkways
- Store tools, equipment and materials properly to prevent falling or sharp edges being exposed
- Stack materials to prevent sliding, falling or collapsing



CLEAR CLUTTER

A cluttered workstation creates more than just an eyesore – it can create a hazardous environment where workers can get injured. Workers should take time throughout the day and at the end of every shift to:

- Tidy up their desk or workstation
- Return tools and other materials to storage after using them
- Dispose of materials that are no longer needed
- Keep aisles, stairways, emergency exits and doors clear of clutter
- Empty trash receptacles before they overflow
- Ensure all cords are properly secured and covered
- Make sure cups, glasses and containers have lids on them to prevent spills

USE AND INSPECT PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND TOOLS

PPE is used to reduce or minimize the exposure or contact to injurious physical, chemical, ergonomic, or biological agents. A hazard cannot be eliminated by PPE, but the risk of injury can be reduced.

- Make sure to wear the proper PPE for every job and task based on the potential risks
- Make sure the PPE is in good working condition and properly fits the employee wearing it
- Wear PPE when cleaning up spills or other material, such as broken glass or plywood
- Wear basic PPE – such as closed-toe shoes and safety glasses – while performing housekeeping
- Regularly inspect, clean and fix tools and remove any damaged tools from the work station

DETERMINE FREQUENCY

While OSHA regulations require that each working surface be cleared of debris, including solid and liquid waste, at the end of each work shift or job, whichever occurs first, to fully realize the benefit of a clean workplace, it is recommended that good housekeeping be maintained throughout the course of the job and workday.

CREATE WRITTEN RULES

Make sure to put housekeeping policies in writing and specify which cleaners, tools and methods should be used under which conditions.

BENEFITS OF GOOD HOUSEKEEPING PRACTICES

According to OSHA, good housekeeping implies that a workplace is kept in an organized, uncluttered, and hazard-free condition. Safe work environments lead to healthier workers, higher worker morale, and increased productivity.

