

Chapter 4 - Good Housekeeping = Safer Work Areas

Suggested Activities

- **Show** employees the locations of housekeeping stations where cleaning products are kept
- **Ask** employees if anyone has noticed any problems.
- **Tour** the immediate area with the group to check for potential hazards

For additional information, refer to the [Background](#) text below.

Background

Good housekeeping in the workplace is more than an attempt to keep things looking presentable. It's also an important safety issue. In fact, OSHA even includes good housekeeping in its regulations. It states (29 CFR 1910.22) that "all places of employment, passageways, storerooms, and service rooms should be kept clean and orderly and in a sanitary condition."

The regulation goes on to make specific mention of keeping floors clean and, where possible, dry: "To facilitate cleaning, every floor, working place, and passageway shall be kept free from protruding nails, splinters, holes, or loose boards." The regulation also says that "aisles and passageways shall be kept clear and in good repair."

OSHA considers this regulation important enough to have issued 747 citations for violating the basic housekeeping regulation in a recent year, as well as hundreds more for violations relating to floors, aisles, and passageways.

Safety Hazards

There are good safety reasons for the agency's concern about housekeeping—and yours. A messy workplace is not only annoying and inefficient, it creates a number of potential safety hazards:

- Tripping and falling over equipment that doesn't belong on the floor, such as machines, tools, cords, hoses, scrap, and boxes.
- Getting hit by or bumping into objects: For instance, tools left perched on the edge of a shelf or table, or a drawer that's left open.
- Punctures and splinters from sharp tools left lying around, or from rough pieces of wood or other sharp objects.
- Serious electrical hazards such as cords left near heat or water.

- Fire hazards, including flammable liquids or scrap left near ignition sources; dust or lint on machinery; or materials blocking fire exits or equipment.
- Chemical exposure or spills when chemical containers are left open.
- Chemical reactions from open chemical container contents exposed to other chemicals, water, or air.
- Potential fatalities if obstacles inhibit an emergency evacuation.

Put It Away

The best way to prevent these dangers is to follow this simple and old-fashioned rule: Assign a specific storage place for each item, and then insist that every item be kept in its assigned place whenever it is not in use.

Yes, that's easier said than done. But the first step is to say it—repeatedly—and then insist that it be done right then and there. If necessary, take the time to reorganize or rearrange the work area to provide an assigned place for all items. You may also want to obtain extra boxes, bins, etc., for storage.

Be sure workers understand that the maintenance department or cleaning staff can't be expected to handle internal housekeeping. Maintenance workers don't know where tools and supplies are supposed to be kept and, in many cases, are prohibited from handling various tools, machines, or chemical containers. In addition, they aren't standing around waiting to clean up a spill or throw away trash. It only takes a second to put, or throw, things away—NOW.

Remember that a neat workplace is more than "nice to have." It's also the law. With persistence, neatness will eventually become a habit. People are even likely to discover that they can do their jobs a lot faster and easier in a neat work area.

Good Housekeeping Checklist

- Keep floors and aisles clear.
- Rest boxes, cords, cables, and hoses on surfaces above floor level.
- Put items away when they're not in use.
- Keep items out of harm's way when setting them aside temporarily during a job.
- Keep sharp tools in sheaths.
- Cover or sand rough, splintered surfaces or edges.
- Keep flammable liquids in proper covered containers.
- Use permanent wiring whenever possible.
(Extension cords are only for temporary use.)
- Keep dust and lint from building up on machinery and work surfaces.

- Dispose of flammable rags in tight, closed, metal containers that are emptied daily.
- Keep chemical containers closed when not in use.
- Inspect chemical containers regularly for leaks.
- Clean up small chemical spills immediately, following the MSDS and company policy.
- Report larger chemical spills for handling by trained responders.
- Clean up nonchemical spills immediately—or block off the area to prevent slipping.
- Keep food, drinks, cigarettes, and personal items off work surfaces. (They belong in lockers or another assigned storage area.)
- Keep cords, wires, and ropes straight and untangled.
- Keep lights clean (dirty bulbs don't give off much light and can be a fire hazard).
- Throw trash away promptly and properly in the proper containers.
- Report holes in the floor, loose boards, or other similar problems.