

# Housekeeping and Safety

By Cari Gray, CSP

## Before you begin

It is important to understand that poor housekeeping can be an indicator of poor safety, quality and even production.

It can also highlight issues in company morale, professionalism and the effectiveness of management. Poor housekeeping affects your bottom line. Think about the first impression you want people to get when they arrive at your facility and if your current workplace exemplifies that or needs improvement.

## What you will learn

- Why housekeeping is an important element in safety
- How to identify and eliminate hazards
- How to motivate improved housekeeping

## Introduction

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulates housekeeping in general industry and construction. Standards 29 CFR 1910.22 and 1926.25 address housekeeping and work conditions. There are other standards in OSHA that require housekeeping in other aspects. Additionally, good housekeeping leads to a safe work environment, not to mention, improved production, quality and effectiveness. Housekeeping is the first impression to all visitors and employees at a facility.

## Discussion

Cleaning and housekeeping are not tasks many employees enjoy. To some, it may seem like a waste of time or unnecessary. Nevertheless, good housekeeping practices can lead to reduced injuries and less regulatory fines.

OSHA regulations have housekeeping requirements that include keeping a "clean and orderly and in a sanitary condition to the extent that the nature of the work allows" and keeping aisles and passageways "clean and in good repair." When dealing with combustible wastes, OSHA requires them to be kept "to a minimum, stored in covered metal receptacles and disposed of daily."

Housekeeping is also an indication of how employees feel about safety. Keep that in mind when designing or maintaining a safety program.

Here are suggested ways to keep work areas organized, clean and safe.

1. Once you are no longer using an item, put it away. Store frequently used items close to the work area. Create a place for everything and put everything in its place mentality.
2. Report and/or repair trip hazards, including floor openings, spills and objects above the normal floor surface.
3. Never place items in aisles or exit pathways. Make sure to mark aisles to prevent confusion.
4. Focus on restrooms because they are a major area of slips and falls. It is good when employees wash their hands. However, problems can occur when they do not dry them. Be sure to maintain bathrooms and clean and/or report spills and leaks.
5. Do not allow a buildup of materials, equipment, flammables or parts. If something is no longer used, get rid of it; intentionally purge high clutter areas periodically.
6. Set aside a short time each shift to clean up and inspect work areas for safety hazards. Cleaning as you go can reduce time spent cleaning a larger area later.

It is important to take responsibility for finding and fixing hazards. Make sure each employee has personal responsibility to keep his or her own work areas clean and report any safety hazards.

Motivating good housekeeping is a big job. Be sure to continually praise those who do it right. A good opportunity for doing this is during regular safety and housekeeping audits. Make sure to acknowledge the good as well as opportunity for improvement. Even though discipline may become necessary, employees respond to praise much more than discipline.

It may be helpful to ask employees how they perceive the housekeeping in their working environment and how it compares to other places they have worked. Engage in discussion on how to improve housekeeping. Be sure employees participate in finding solutions and discussing concerns for housekeeping.

## Group activities

1. The group can do an audit of a specific area. Employees can create a check list of items to look for.
2. Create a housekeeping competition for who has the best housekeeping.
3. Spend time as a group cleaning up an area.

**Note:** It is very important to make progress on an area that staff is auditing, especially before another audit occurs. No progress will greatly reduce the morale of the employees conducting the audit.

## Conclusion

Good housekeeping is “maintained” not “achieved” and needs done regularly. No matter what job we have, safety and housekeeping are a part of that job. A clean worksite is a safe worksite.

### References

www.osha.gov - 29 CFR 1910.22, 29 CFR 1910.106  
<http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/house.html>

### Author

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