

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING AT WORK

When we think of ‘housekeeping’ we tend to think of the common phrase: “A place for everything and everything in its place.” But housekeeping means more than this. Good housekeeping means having no unnecessary items about and keeping all necessary items in their proper places.

Importance of housekeeping

Think about what could happen if a bunch of oily rags suddenly caught fire one night, or if, in an emergency, employees couldn’t get out of the work area safely because aisles were cluttered. Imagine those same employees unable to get out altogether because of a blocked exit.

Experience has shown that good housekeeping is an essential part of your company’s health and safety program.

Benefits of good housekeeping

Good housekeeping at work benefits both employers and employees alike. Good housekeeping can:

- Eliminate clutter which is a common cause of accidents, such as slips, trips, and falls, and fires and explosions
- Reduce the chances of harmful materials entering the body (e.g., dusts, vapours)
- Improve productivity (the right tools and materials for the job will be easy to find)
- Improve your company’s image (good housekeeping reflects a well-run business. An orderly workplace will impress all who enter it – employees, visitors, customers, etc.)
- Help your company to keep its inventory to a minimum (good housekeeping makes it easier to keep an accurate count of inventories)

- Help your company to make the best use of its space
- Make the workplace neat, comfortable and pleasant – not a dangerous eyesore

Signs of poor housekeeping

There are many signs of poor housekeeping. You may recognize some of these in your own workplace:

- Cluttered and poorly arranged work areas
- Untidy or dangerous storage of materials (e.g., materials stuffed in corners, overcrowded shelves, etc.)
- Dusty, dirty floors and work surfaces
- Items that are in excess or no longer needed
- Blocked or cluttered aisles and exits
- Tools and equipment left in work areas instead of being returned to proper storage places
- Broken containers and damaged materials
- Overflowing waste bins and containers
- Spills and leaks

Improving housekeeping in your workplace

Good housekeeping requires effort and teamwork, but it’s worth it. Here are some general pointers:

- Set housekeeping standards. Make sure they are clear, objective and attainable. Standards should make work easier, safer and healthier. It is best to involve employees when setting standards.
- Measure how well the standards are met
- Use checklists to help you to systematically measure housekeeping

- Provide positive feedback by letting employees know how well they are doing and how to improve
- Encourage housekeeping as a way of life – not just a special activity when visitors are coming

Whether your workplace is an office, plant, store, or warehouse, here are some recommended housekeeping practices:

- Follow safe work procedures and the requirements of the law
- Keep work areas clean
- Keep aisles clear
- Keep exits and entrances clear
- Keep floors clean, dry and in good condition
- Vacuum or wet sweep dusty areas frequently
- Stack and store items safely
- Store all work materials (for example, paper products, flammable liquids, etc.) in approved, clearly labelled containers in designated storage areas only
- Use proper waste containers
- Keep sprinklers, fire alarms and fire extinguishers clear
- Clean up spills and leaks of any type quickly and properly
- Clean and store tools, items and equipment properly
- Fix or report broken or damaged tools, equipment, etc.
- Keep lighting sources clean and clear
- Follow maintenance requirements

‘Dangerous’ accidents are related to material handling and housekeeping. Poorly stacked materials may fall or slide down and objects blocking areas could cause bumps, bruising or tripping. When placing materials in storage areas:

- Store heavy items (those weighing more than 6.8 kg or 15lb) on shelves at a height between the shoulders and knees

- Use a ladder or step stool to reach items on high shelves – avoid stretching
- Store all objects securely on shelves and racks to keep them from falling over
- Leave enough room between the top of the stored goods and the ceiling in areas protected by a sprinkler system
- Always knock and slowly open the door of any walk-in storage area that enters directly into a high-traffic location
- Store compressed gas cylinders (e.g., helium carbon dioxide) with the valve cap on, standing upright and securely fastened to prevent tipping or falling
- Store flammable liquids in properly sealed containers and place them in a designated area

What the law says

The Regulation for Industrial Establishments (R.R.O. *851/90) has a number of sections that apply to housekeeping. They are:

- s.11: Floor conditions;
- s.21: Lighting;
- s.22: Storage of flammable liquids;
- s.47: Storage of cylinder-shaped objects;
- s.48: Storage of barrels;
- s.123: Fire extinguishers, aisles, exits, etc.

*Revised Regulation of Ontario

The Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) Regulation (R.R.O. 860/90):

- s.8-16: Identification and labeling of hazardous materials in the workplace.

Housekeeping Checklist

This is a sample checklist that you can also use as a pre-shift check. Modify it to suit your needs.

		Meets standard	✓	Comments
		Doesn't meet standard	✗	
Aisles	Clean			
	Clear			
	Well-marked			
Exits and Entrances	Clear			
	Well-marked			
	Free of ice, snow, water and other obstructions			
Hand and Portable Tools	Properly stored when in use/not in use			
	Fire Fighting Equipment			
	Clearly marked			
	Accessible			
Floors	Clean			
	Clear			
	In good condition			
	Well-drained			
Ladders	In good condition			
	Free of gas/oil			
	Secure when in use/not in use			
Lighting	Adequate			
	Clean			
Machines	Clean			
Roadways, Parking Areas	In good repair			
	Well-marked			
	Clear of ice, snow			
Signs, tags	Adequate			
	Appropriate			
	Clean			

		Meets standard	✓	Comments
		Doesn't meet standard	✗	
Stacking and Storage	Aisles clear			
	Stacks stable, secure			
	Well labeled			
	Area clean and clear			
Stairs	Non-slip tread			
	Clean			
	Clear			
	In good condition			
Ventilation Systems	Clean			
	Clear			
Waste Disposal	Adequate number of bins			
	Separate and approved containers for oily rags, flammable scrap, etc.			

Initials of person doing walk-through: _____ **Date:** _____

© Workplace Safety & Prevention Services 2011. Workplace Safety & Prevention Services (WSPS) grants permission to approved end users to reproduce this document in whole or in part, provided its intended use is for non-commercial, educational purposes and that full acknowledgement is given to the WSPS. Approved end users are firms registered with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. WSPS reserves the right to extend this permission to other stakeholders and interested parties by express written permission upon application. WSPS extends no warranty to materials amended or altered by the end user. Under no circumstances is this document, or any portion thereof, to be duplicated for purposes of sale or for external reproduction or distribution.

Revised: June 2011