

Housekeeping at Work

What is housekeeping?

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.

What’s so important about 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.

What are the benefits of good housekeeping at work?

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 it’s 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.



Keeping work areas organized and clean can help make work safer, healthier and easier

What are some 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 (for example, materials stuffed in corners; overcrowded shelves);
- 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.

How to improve 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. (Remember: what gets measured gets done.)
- Use checklists to help you to systematically measure housekeeping. (See page 3 for a sample checklist.)

- Provide positive feedback. Let 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.

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 ✓		Doesn't meet standard ✕		Meets standard ✓		Doesn't meet standard ✕		Comments	
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 grease/oil										
	secure when in use/not in use										
Lighting	adequate										
	clean										
Machines	clean										
	clear										
	in good condition										
Initials of person doing walk-through: _____ Date: _____											

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 labelling of hazardous materials in the workplace.

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