Housekeeping at Work? Don’t Sweep It Under the Rug

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

Housekeeping at work is about much more than cleaning windows and sweeping up dust bunnies. Poor housekeeping can cause injuries, slow down production, dampen morale, start fires and cause catastrophic explosions of combustible dusts.

WHAT’S THE DANGER?

A messy workplace not only affects workers’ safety and morale, it makes a bad impression on potential and current customers and regulatory officers. How much harder do you think an inspector will look at your work area if it’s unorganized and messy? The answer is; a LOT harder.

Poor housekeeping contributes to accidents by:

- Covering up hazards, such as frayed wires or damaged cords.
- Creating slip and trip hazards, including boxes, pallets and cords cluttering walkways, and spills and leaks on workroom and breakroom floors.
- Providing fuel for a fire, in the form of cardboard, trash, and flammable vapors; and
- Encouraging a sloppy mindset. If clutter, spills, and disorganization are the norm, it’s not long before more serious safety hazards are overlooked because they, too, have become the norm.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

The first thing to remember about housekeeping is that it is ongoing. Get into the habit of cleaning up as you go through your day.

Remember these tips for housekeeping in industrial and construction settings:

- Clean up spills immediately, or report them if you aren’t trained to clean them up.
- Put lids and caps back on containers and bottles after every use.
- Put tools, equipment and boxes back where they belong.
- Take out trash and recycling on a regular basis so it doesn’t have a chance to pile up.
- Follow maintenance procedures for machines and equipment to help contain leaks and
- overspray from machines; and
- Control dust accumulation. Dust accumulation is a significant fire and explosion hazard.

Offices, retail spaces, restaurants and healthcare settings should be kept clean, organized and free from fire hazards too.

1. Close cabinet drawers to prevent others from tripping on them or causing the cabinet to tip over.
2. Push unoccupied chairs in against desks or workstations and keep items out of aisles and walkways.
3. Clean up spills and put out caution signs when floors are wet; and finally
4. Report water, ice, and snow on sidewalks and around doors. Clean it up if you can.

General housekeeping tips for all workplaces:

- Don’t block sprinkler heads, fire extinguishers and other emergency equipment. Keep material and equipment at least 18 inches (46 centimetres) away from sprinkler heads.
- Prevent objects from falling by paying attention to how high material is stacked and stored.
- Keep walkways clear of clutter.
- Practice proper storage. Whether it is chemicals, garbage, boxes, bins, or bags—store it correctly to prevent spills, vapor accumulation, unstable piles, and damage to tools and equipment.

FINAL WORD

Good housekeeping helps keep your safety record clean by preventing injuries, chemical hazards, fires and explosions. It also improves morale and productivity by making it easier for you to find what you need to do your job.