

Bad Housekeeping Can Bring Unthinkable

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Some people can't stand a mess, while others leave an evidence trail of poor housekeeping everywhere, they go. But in the workplace, bad housekeeping can have consequences that go far beyond creating an image of a sloppily run, unprofessional operation.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Poor housekeeping causes a wide range of injuries and fatalities, ranging from painful slips, trips and falls, to workers being unable to evacuate burning buildings because of blocked fire exits, to dust explosions that can claim multiple lives in an instant.

Example

The lead singer and guitarist of a popular band was participating in a game show in Japan when he fell head-first from a slippery and wet stage to the floor below. He suffered severe brain injuries and died several days later.

And dust explosions, many of which are linked to poor housekeeping, have claimed more than 100 workers' lives and injured about 600 others across the US since the early 1980s, according to the US Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

The possibilities for injury or death in a cluttered workplace are many. Workers can slip on spilled material that hasn't been cleaned up, trip over debris on a floor, hurt themselves while walking past heavy or sharp objects that are protruding from shelves or be struck by unsecured items that shift and fall from racking.

If sawdust, sugar or other material is left to accumulate on surfaces and it comes in contact

with an ignition source, it can cause a deadly explosion and fire.

It is neither safe nor practical for you to sweep dust off a beam high in the air in your workplace. If you are concerned about a buildup of combustible dust and the potential for an explosion, talk to your supervisor.

As a worker, there's plenty you can do on the ground to keep yourself and your co-workers safe. While it can be annoying to see someone create a mess such as a spill and walk away from it, ignoring that mess yourself is wrong because it puts everyone in danger.

The few seconds it takes to mop up a coffee spill on the floor or sweep up some wood chips and sawdust can make a huge difference to the safety of your workplace. But if you don't know what the spilled material is, talk to your supervisor before attempting to clean it up.

Here are some other important housekeeping tips to remember and practice:

- When you are finished using tools or material, return them to their proper place and clean up anything that is left sitting on work surfaces or floors.
- If you observe materials protruding from shelving that could either fall onto workers or injure anyone walking by, push them back or if they are too large to handle or cannot be repositioned so they fit on the shelf, report them to your supervisor.
- Ensure that all walkways are free of obstructions such as materials, tools, or wires that could cause someone to trip or fall.
- Never stack material to a height where it becomes unstable and might fall.
- If emergency exit routes are blocked by material, inform your supervisor.

- Don't leave garbage hanging around. Trash should be taken to a dumpster at the end of the shift.
- Dispose of oily rags in covered metal containers. These containers need to be emptied on a regular basis.
- Ensure that fire extinguishers and sprinkler systems are not blocked by equipment or materials.

FINAL WORD

Some people are neat and others are messy. How you keep your home is up to you, but you are not free to create messes in the workplace that could result in your own or other workers' injury or worse. Keep things neat, for safety's sake.

QUIZ

1. Messy workplaces may not look great, but they are not unsafe.
 - ☐ True
 - ☐ False
2. How many lives have been lost in the United States in the last 25 years due to workplace combustible dust explosions?
 1. 1,000
 2. None
 3. More than 100
 4. 27
3. Some people refuse to attend to others' messes, such as spills. Why is this attitude dangerous?

4. It's fine to toss oily rags in the nearest trash can.
 - ☐ True
 - ☐ False
5. Name two hazards tied to leaving material protruding past the end of a shelf.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

You see a pool of liquid spilled on the floor and your first impulse is to wipe it up. But you have no idea whether it's a potentially hazardous chemical or something harmless. Your supervisor is on a lunch break. How should you deal with this situation?

BEFORE THE TALK - TIPS

- Take a walk around your workplace to check for any hazards posed by poor housekeeping. If you spot anything potentially dangerous, ask your workers to deal with the problem.
- Before you deliver the talk, ask your workers for a show of hands as to who thinks housekeeping is only for show and who thinks it is an important safety issue.
- Plan to ask your workers if they have ever been injured as a result of other workers' poor housekeeping.
- Just before the meeting, rope off a small area to ensure no one will enter it and set up three housekeeping hazards, such as a spill, a small pipe on the floor and metal pieces protruding from a shelf. After you deliver this Safety Talk have your workers view the area and point out the hazards.
- Tell workers that they should only clean up others' spills when they know that what has been spilled is safe to handle.
- Ensure they take the housekeeping safety message home, by reminding them to not block doors and windows that need to be kept accessible should a house fire or other home emergency unfold.

AFTER THE TALK- CHECKLIST

PROVIDED FOLLOW-UP TO WORKERS THAT DID

POORLY ON THE QUIZ

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

OBSERVED WORKERS

TASK(S): _____

DATE: _____

REFRESHER TRAINING

TOPIC(S): _____

DATE: _____

OTHER (DESCRIBE): _____

MEETING DATE: _____

LOCATION: _____

NOTES

[illegible]

ANSWERS:

1. False
2. 3
3. Because others could become hurt as a result of slipping or falling on liquid or debris left on a floor,
4. False
5. It could fall on unsuspecting workers or they could bump into it and injure themselves.

ATTENDANCE

[illegible]

INSTRUCTOR: _____ **DATE:** _____

SAFETY TALK: _____