

HOUSEKEEPING

Housekeeping is the number one problem on construction sites. In fact, a large number of workplace incidents can be attributed to poor housekeeping. Poor housekeeping contributes to incidents by creating hazards that can cause injuries. Other hazards may be taken for granted if the sight of paper, debris, clutter and spills are accepted on the worksite.

What is the purpose of workplace housekeeping?

Poor housekeeping can be a cause of accidents, such as:

- tripping over loose objects on floors, stairs, and platforms
- being hit by falling objects
- slipping on greasy, wet or dirty surfaces
- striking against projecting, poorly stacked items, or misplaced material
- cutting, puncturing, or tearing the skin of hands or other parts of the body on projecting nails, wire, or steel strapping.

To avoid these hazards, a workplace must "maintain" order throughout a workday. Although this effort requires a great deal of management and planning, the benefits are many.

What are some benefits of good housekeeping practices?

Effective housekeeping results in:

- reduced handling to ease the flow of materials
- fewer tripping and slipping accidents in clutter-free and spill-free work areas
- decreased fire hazards
- lower worker exposures to hazardous substances (e.g. dusts, vapors)
- better control of tools and materials, including inventory and supplies
- more efficient equipment cleanup and maintenance
- better hygienic conditions leading to improved health
- more effective use of space
- reduced property damage by improving preventive maintenance
- less janitorial work
- improved morale and improved productivity (tools and materials will be easy to find)

How do we implement an effective housekeeping program?

Housekeeping order is "maintained" not "achieved." Cleaning and organization must be done regularly, not just at the end of the shift. Integrating housekeeping into jobs can help ensure this is done. A good housekeeping program identifies and assigns responsibilities for the following:

- clean up during the shift
- day-to-day cleanup
- waste disposal
- removal of unused materials
- inspection to ensure cleanup is complete

Do not forget out-of-the-way places such as shelves, basements, sheds, and boiler rooms that would otherwise be overlooked. The orderly arrangement of operations, tools, equipment and supplies is an important part of a good housekeeping program.

Final Word

Effective housekeeping is an ongoing operation, it is not a hit-and-miss cleanup done occasionally. Periodic "panic" cleanups are costly and ineffective in reducing accidents.