

## SAFETY BRIEF: **GOOD HOUSEKEEPING PRACTICES**

Keeping everything clean and orderly is a project that's never finished, and some of the items that most frequently appear on facility inspection reports relate to poor housekeeping. There's no OSHA standard that specifically addresses housekeeping, and OSHA does not require training on housekeeping, but many rules do include housekeeping provisions. Employees who know why a tidy workplace is important will be more diligent in their housekeeping efforts. Let's take a look at some of OSHA's general industry requirements that relate to housekeeping.

### **1. Introduce good housekeeping through OSHA's rules for walking and working surfaces.**

It's clear that housekeeping practices have an impact on meeting OSHA's general requirements for walking and working surfaces (1910.22). The rule states:

- Housekeeping is to be clean, orderly, and sanitary.
- Floors are to be clean and dry.
- Aisles and passageways are to have sufficient clearance. They are to be kept clear, without obstructions that could create a hazard.
- Permanent aisles are to be marked.

Some examples of violations of these rules are: blocked aisles, material lying across an aisle or on the floor, wet or oily floors, or material overhanging high shelves.

### **2. Emphasize how good housekeeping can help people evacuate the building in case of an emergency.**

By meeting OSHA's rules for exit routes (1910.34-1910.37), it's easier and safer for everyone to evacuate in an emergency. The "exit route" is a continuous and unobstructed path of exit travel from any point within a workplace to a place of safety. An exit route consists of three parts:

- the exit access,
- the exit, and
- the exit discharge.

Exit routes must be free and unobstructed. No materials or equipment may be placed, permanently or temporarily, within the exit route. An exit access must be at least 28 inches wide at all points.

Storing materials where they block an exit route is an obvious housekeeping-related violation of these requirements.

### **3. Discuss how proper chemical storage improves fire safety.**

The storage of flammable and combustible liquids must meet OSHA's strict requirements (1910.106):

- Flammable and combustible liquids are to be kept in covered containers,
- OSHA sets limits on the quantities of flammable and combustible liquids that may be kept outside of protected storage,



- Inside storage rooms must have approved self-closing fire doors, and
- The inside storage room must have one clear aisle at least three feet wide, and containers over 30 gallons cannot be stacked.

Examples of violations would include open containers of flammable liquids, blocking open a fire door, stacking drums in a storage room, or leaving materials in the storage room's aisle.

#### **4. Describe how poor housekeeping can impact fire protection systems.**

OSHA's requirements for portable fire extinguishers and automatic sprinkler systems (1910.157 and 1910.159) include some housekeeping provisions:

- Fire extinguishers must be mounted, located, and identified so that they are readily accessible;
- Fire extinguishers are to be kept in their designated places at all times except during use; and
- There must be at least 18 inches of clearance below sprinklers.

Some examples of violations would be leaving carts, cartons, etc., in front of fire extinguishers or stacking materials on shelves too close to sprinklers.

#### **5. Highlight how electrical safety depends on good housekeeping.**

OSHA's general requirements for electrical systems (1910.303) state:

- Working space around live parts must generally be at least three feet for voltages of 600 or less,
- Workspace in front of electric equipment operating at 600 volts or less must be at least 30 inches wide, and
- Working space may not be used for storage.

An example of a housekeeping-related violation would be storing items where they block access to an electrical panel.

#### **6. Explain how meeting OSHA's sanitation requirements depends on good housekeeping.**

OSHA's requirements for sanitation (1910.141) include some housekeeping provisions:

- Floors are to be kept dry;
- Disposal containers used for liquids or solids that may turn putrid must not leak, and they must have tight fitting covers;
- Sweepings, wastes, and refuse must be removed; and
- No food or beverages can be stored in toilet rooms or in an area that is exposed to a toxic material.

Violations could include wet or oily floors, open waste containers for discarded food, or trash build-up.

## **7. Outline the housekeeping policies at your facility.**

You may be surprised that so many OSHA regulations are related to housekeeping. But, company-specific housekeeping rules are just as important.

Provide employees with a list of your housekeeping rules, and clarify who has housekeeping responsibilities.

## **8. Discuss some housekeeping solutions.**

We've discussed some housekeeping problems that are OSHA violations. Can you think of some ways to eliminate these hazards? Here are some ideas:

- Are there enough waste bins for each area?
- Do employees need more brooms, dustpans, mops, etc., so it would be easier for them to clean up after themselves?
- How much time is everyone spending on clean-up?
- Could this time be better organized by using checklists or schedules?
- Do you need to install more storage shelves, racks, or cabinets? Where could you put them?
- Would more tool boxes or chests help to keep tools where they belong?
- Are there any areas where food and beverages should be prohibited?
- Is there a better way to mark "no storage" areas?
- Should you set up a housekeeping inspection team?

Brainstorm with your employees to come up with solutions to some of the poor housekeeping examples that are brought up.

## **9. Summarize the benefits of good housekeeping.**

Meeting OSHA requirements is only one reason to have a clean and orderly workplace. There are many benefits to a good housekeeping program:

- Better organization makes things easier to find, and harder to lose;
- It's easier to notice items that are no longer useful when the workplace is organized — and they get disposed of more easily;
- You have a lower risk for fire when you have less clutter;
- You have a lower risk of injuries from slips, trips, and falls when the workplace is orderly; and
- A clean atmosphere improves morale and lets you feel proud of your workplace.