

# **YOUR GUIDE TO CLEANING AND HOUSEKEEPING**

Your Practical Guide



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## Introduction

*The terms cleaning and good housekeeping are closely linked but have different meanings. Cleaning is broadly defined as the 'removal and proper disposal of dirt and debris', while housekeeping is 'keeping a place for everything and everything in its place'.*

Satisfactory levels of workplace cleanliness and housekeeping have been taken into account by the law for many years. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (HSWA) requires employers to ensure the health and safety of all employees and anyone who may be affected by their work, and to maintain the workplace and/or premises in a safe condition, which includes adequate cleaning and housekeeping arrangements.

Whilst the actual word 'housekeeping' may not appear in the Act, the HSWA imposes a duty to ensure that workplaces and/or premises are maintained in a safe fashion and that access and egress are also safe. Untidiness increases the risk of accidents, and a workplace that is untidy is unlikely to comply with the requirements of the HSWA and other Regulations which apply.

Where a workplace is dirty, or is untidy with spillages, or debris, and where equipment has been left where it was last used, a number of hazards exist, leading to the risk of accidents. The most common workplace injuries are the result of slips, trips and falls, together with the secondary effects of damaged equipment and the deterioration of the fabric of the building.

In addition, most workplace activities generate waste or use liquids that will increase the risk of accidents if they are not adequately controlled.

The Workplace (Health and Safety and Welfare) Regulations require floors to be suitable, in good condition and free from obstruction, and that the premises, workplace and inherent furniture, furnishings and fittings must be kept sufficiently clean.

You should not allow waste materials to accumulate in workplaces, except when kept in suitable receptacles.

It is accepted that the standards of cleaning will vary and depend on the use of the workplace, and in some types of premises it may be necessary to produce and operate a schedule detailing cleaning methods and frequency.

You also need to ensure that the cleaning methods used don't create any additional health and safety risks – for example dust, fumes, and slippery surfaces.

## Cleaning Schedules and Plans

*Random unplanned action is hardly ever acceptable where cleaning is concerned – it is best carried out by means of a schedule or plan, based on a careful and systematic survey of the premises. Regular inspections are essential to ensure the plan works effectively.*

A typical schedule would cover:

- what needs to be cleaned: premises, areas, rooms, surfaces, plant and equipment
- extent and degree of contamination
- standards and frequency of cleaning
- methods of cleaning; wet, dry, vacuum, etc
- materials used for cleaning
- people responsible for meeting and maintaining the set standards
- system of inspection to monitor the work
- the precautions necessary, particularly when using chemical-based cleaning agents
- a review process – to allow for changing needs or standards
- identification of the management who have ultimate responsibility for cleaning and who co-ordinate the agreed system(s).

## Hazardous Substances

*The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations require that all hazardous substances must be identified – including those stored, handled, transported or used. Identification must include substances purchased as cleaning agents or for maintenance purposes as well as those produced as by-products or waste.*

For further guidance on hazardous substances, see AXA's Health and Safety Information Sheet.

## Risk Assessment

*The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations build on the HSWA and include duties on employers to assess risks and, where necessary, take action to safeguard health and safety.*

Risk assessments should be used to identify the hazards in all areas of the workplace and/or premises; this includes places of work as well as the means of access and egress. Routine thorough and systematic inspections should be used to monitor health and safety precautions.

These should ensure effective action is taken to deal with the immediate problems and minimise the risks of accidents. The assessments should also be used to determine the standard and frequency of cleaning.

For further guidance on risk assessment, see AXA's Health and Safety Information Sheet.

## Safe Use of Cleaning Preparations

*Great care must be taken when considering the type of cleaning preparations that are be used, as these could include:*

- acids – to remove hard-water scale
- alkalis – to break down and remove fat, grease and carbon
- detergents or ‘wetting agents’ – for cleaning contaminated equipment
- solvents – to soften fats, grease and oils
- disinfectants – to kill harmful organisms

Cleanliness is directly concerned with the protection of premises, plant and the workforce from the effects of preventable accidents. Poor hygiene standards can lead to occupational ill-health and other adverse conditions connected with the work environment.

Your business will profit from improved hygiene and cleaning standards in the workplace because a reduction in the incidence of occupational illness will directly reflect in a reduction of workforce absence-related costs.

And it's not just your business that will benefit from applying a properly planned system for the safe use of cleaning preparations – your people will too.

## Good Housekeeping Standards

*Keeping the workplace tidy minimises the risk of accidents. You should ensure things are put away after use, especially at the end of the day or work period. When a regime of tidiness isn't applied, a casual attitude soon develops amongst the workforce.*

Examples include:

- discarded boxes, cartons, packing materials and personal protective equipment
- poor storage of equipment, furniture, products and materials
- substances left out after use
- work surfaces littered with discarded tools
- thoughtlessly parked mobile plant or vehicles

It is easier not to put items away after use in the hope someone else will, but this defeats the objective of a clean, tidy workplace. Good housekeeping calls for a combination of self-discipline, organised storage, effective supervision, proper management and training to develop the right attitude. Housekeeping and cleaning are an essential part of accident and occupational ill-health prevention.

Hazardous substances in particular demand good housekeeping standards, and certain basic rules should apply, such as:

- planned systematic storage
- exclusion of food, drink and smoking from work areas
- clear and accurate labelling of containers
- issue of formal written procedures to all staff involved
- adequate and effective training.

## Maintaining Standards

*To maintain satisfactory standards and make a significant contribution towards reducing the risk of accidents and occupational ill-health, you need to plan an effective management system for cleaning and good housekeeping.*

To achieve this you should

- examine each section of the workplace
- identify problems
- allow for prompt and effective action, and then
- follow it up to ensure all action has actually been taken.

Routine inspections should be based on a checklist (see the example on the next page) so each aspect or potential hazard is covered in an orderly, systematic way.

Of course good housekeeping is common sense, but you can't depend on everyone always behaving sensibly, so regular, planned, systematic checks of the workplace are essential.

## Basic Checklist for Good Housekeeping

- Are all floor areas free of liquids (e.g. water, oil,) or solids which could easily cause people to slip?  Yes  No
- Is there a procedure for reporting spillages and leakages, and attending to them speedily?  Yes  No
- Does your Health & Safety Policy clearly set out who is accountable and responsible for good housekeeping?  Yes  No
- Do you actively promote and publicise good housekeeping? (E.g. by effective supervision, or posters, or good housekeeping competitions)  Yes  No
- Are materials and substances suitably stored and not liable to constitute a hazard?  Yes  No
- Are waste or surplus materials and substances returned to a designated storage area or placed in a waste bin/skip?  Yes  No
- Are designated pedestrian walkways kept clear?  Yes  No
- Are trailing leads from portable electrical equipment (office machinery, portable power tools etc.) tied away and not liable to constitute a hazard?  Yes  No
- Is there adequate lighting so that people can safely make their way through the premises? (This is particularly important on staircases)  Yes  No
- Is there a procedure for reporting and replacing defective light fittings, blown bulbs/tubes etc.?  Yes  No
- Is there adequate artificial lighting for outdoor pedestrian routes during the hours of darkness?  Yes  No

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