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Housekeeping: Maintaining a Safe, Clean Workplace



An example of a cluttered workplace

Keeping the workplace clean is an essential part of workplace safety. When the workplace is not maintained in a clean and orderly manner, hazards and unsafe conditions that have the potential to cause serious injury - not only to the employee but to others in the surrounding area - can develop. The workplace and nature of the work deter-

-mine what is required to maintain a condition that does not cause injury to employees.

Cluttered work places can present many dangers. For example, a cluttered office that is filled with paper, boxes, files, periodicals, newspapers or other items on the floor, blocking doors, and under furniture, will slow egress and could hamper or prevent occupant escape in the event of a fire or other emergency. An exit route must be at least 18 inches (45.7cm) wide for a single person or 28 inches (71.1cm) wide for multiple persons at all points, and doors must be able to open to permit exit from workspaces. Items stored on the floor covering the route of egress will create slip or trip hazards.

Excess accumulation of combustible paper and boxes can create a fire growth. Some sprinkler systems may not be designed to protect against such fire loading. The sprinkler discharge water flow might not be sufficient to handle the contents in the area, which could allow the fire to spread faster into other areas of the facility. Items stored within 18" of a sprinkler head, or items attached to sprinkler heads or pipes, as well as structural members of the building blocking sprinkler coverage, could interfere with the water flow once sprinklers are activated. Combustible items can be shielded from sprinkler coverage by being stored under desks or tables.



An example of too much stuff in one work space



Example of papers covering power strips and appliances

Electrical appliances such as computers and power strips are not designed to be covered by stacked boxes, files, newspapers and other materials. Any of these items buried under several feet of compacted papers and boxes with no air circulation to carry off the heat could ignite and potentially cause a fast-moving fire fueled by excessive combustibles and shielded from control by the sprinklers.

Another concern is the improper storage of bags, containers or bundles that are stacked in warehouses, shops, office storage areas and closets. Unstable stacks of heavy boxes that tilt and lean create the potential for collapses, possibly seriously injuring an employee standing nearby. Vertically stored items need to be properly stacked and secured in order to prevent them from sliding or collapsing.



Unstable boxes that improperly store bags and other work related items



An example of an unclean and hazardous workplace

Other conditions can occur when workplaces are not maintained in a clean or orderly fashion or the workplace is not kept clean to the extent that the nature of the work allows. Areas of clutter can become a catch-all for items such as unsecured cylinders, old chemicals and outdated pieces of equipment. Rodents, insects and vermin

can seek shelter in storage areas that are not kept in an orderly condition. The potential for this kind of infestation is more likely in outdoor storage. However, failure to maintain food and trash in a sanitary manner can also allow these types of pests to breed in offices.

Establish housekeeping requirements for your workplace by considering the following:

- The amount of clear space for each employee to work and exit
- Set-up and placement of equipment or furniture
- Type of work conducted in the space
- Materials required to do the work
- Storage considerations for work materials and waste collection
- Timely disposal of trash
- Environmental conditions in or affecting the workplace

Things that can be done to maintain a safe, clean workplace:

- Prepare and implement an effective housekeeping process, including scheduled inspections
- Document housekeeping inspections and maintain a record retention process
- Communicate requirements and expectations to all employees
- Train employees in proper storage and housekeeping
- Provide incentives for maintaining good housekeeping
- Provide feedback to employees about the way the workplace is maintained

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The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards listed below provide general guidance for maintaining a safe and clean workplace. The information below can be obtained at www.osha.gov

29 CFR 1910.22 (a)

- “All places of employment, passageways, storerooms and service rooms shall be kept clean and orderly and in a sanitary condition.”

29 CFR 1910.22 (a)(2)

- “The floor of every workroom shall be maintained in a clean and, so far as possible, a dry condition.”

29 CFR 1910.141 (a)(3)(i)

- “All places of employment shall be kept clean to the extent that the nature of the work allows.”

Additional OSHA regulations that reference clean work environment requirements are listed below:

Industry specific:

29 CFR 1915.91 Shipyards
29 CFR 1926.25 Construction
29 CFR 1910.272 Grain Handling

Specific work areas:

29 CFR 1910.1001 Asbestos
29 CFR 1910.1450 Chemical Laboratories
29 CFR 1910.1025 Lead



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