

OCWR Fast Facts

Housekeeping: Maintaining a Safe, Clean Workspace



Maintain a safe, clean workplace by communicating to employees the requirements and expectations of proper storage and good housekeeping at work.

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 determine what is required to maintain safe working conditions.

Walking Surfaces and Emergency Routes

Cluttered workplaces can present many dangers. For example, a cluttered office that is filled with paper, boxes, files, periodicals, newspapers, or items on the floor, blocking doors, and under furniture, will slow egress and could hamper or prevent occupants from escape in the event of a fire or other emergency. An exit route must be at least 28 inches wide at all points, remain free of storage and unobstructed, and doors must be able to open to permit exit from workspaces. Items improperly stored along the route of egress may create slip or trip hazards and potentially obstruct exits.

Fire and Electrical Hazards

Excess accumulation of combustible paper and boxes can fuel a fire. 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 a fire to spread faster into other areas of a facility. Items stored within 18 inches 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.

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 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.

Areas of clutter can become a catch-all for items such as unsecured cylinders, old chemicals, and outdated pieces of equipment.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.

Falling Objects Hazards

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

Sanitary Conditions

Other conditions can occur when workplaces are not maintained in a clean and orderly fashion or if the workplace is not kept clean to the extent that the nature of the work requires. 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 orderly conditions. 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 required 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 requirements for work material and waste collection
- Timely disposal of trash
- Environmental conditions in or affecting the workplace
- Routine cleaning schedules for food storage areas

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



Additional Information

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards listed below provide general guidance for maintaining a safe and clean workplace. Visit [osha.gov](https://www.osha.gov) for more information.

29 CFR 1910.22 (a)(1).

“All places of employment, passageways, storerooms, service rooms, and walking-working surfaces are kept in a clean, orderly, and sanitary condition.”

29 CFR 1910.22 (a)(2).

“The floor of each workroom is maintained in a clean and, to the extent feasible, in a dry condition. When wet processes are used, drainage must be maintained and, to the extent feasible, dry standing places, such as false floors, platforms, and mats must be provided.”

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.”



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