



Occupational Safety and Health Housekeeping in the Workplace

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What do we mean by poor housekeeping?

One of the most common findings in workplaces is poor housekeeping i.e. untidiness, disorder, poor storage of materials and stock. On many workplace inspection visits one can usually see dirt and dust on the workbenches, light fittings and floors etc. Generally speaking, a cleaning programme appears to take place on an occasional ad-hoc basis. Such clutter not only reduces productivity by “blocking” the smooth flow of materials through the workplace, it can often present a fire hazard as boxes, trimmings and other combustible material is strewn on the premises. Apart from encouraging vermin and

their associated health hazards, it is also a sign of inefficiency and waste.

Workplaces which have introduced regular cleaning programmes using industrial vacuum cleaners for example, not only reduce levels of dust and dirt in the workplace, but also improve the general working environment and workers’ health. In addition a) they reduce maintenance costs as the machines remain cleaner for longer periods b) there is less absenteeism through sickness, and c) ultimately the factory has a competitive advantage through improved productivity.



Poor housekeeping – a messy workplace is a sign of an inefficient business .



A neat and tidy workplace is a sign of an efficient business.



Do not sweep or use compressed air to clean machines - use an industrial vacuum.

It is also essential to organize better storage of raw materials, stock, and “work-in-progress” goods throughout the workplace. All unnecessary items should be removed as well as all waste. A cluttered workplace:

- reduces the work space for each worker and will thereby reduce productivity;
- impedes the free movement of workers and goods;
- represents a fire hazard;

- hinders egress in the case of an emergency;
- makes it more likely for goods spoil;
- reduces the free flow of air (and therefore raises the temperature) in the workplace. For example, we often see boxes or racks of finished goods or stock being piled high. They often block windows, air bricks, fire exits, etc., thus creating other hazard situations.

In these situations, employers often complain about the lack of space in the workplace and the workers talk of overcrowding and hot temperatures. For this reason it is essential to make much better use of the available space through better housekeeping, storage, etc.



This mechanical workshop shows poor housekeeping

This workshop is clean, tidy and each area of the floor is clearly delineated to show where the machines should be placed and also aisles for walking or transport. There is very little mess in any part of the workshop. Regular cleaning of the workplace and training of the workers help to ensure the high standards.



What can be done to improve housekeeping?

The storage and handling of raw materials, components and products is an essential part of all production processes. Given the limited space in many Caribbean workplaces, it is essential to organize the storage of goods and materials better.

Some simple suggestions to organize and store goods and material

- Remove old stock, scrap material and all obsolete machines.
- Plan a better layout/production flow.
- Avoid placing materials on the floor.
- Use multi-level racks to gain productive space.
- Provide containers for materials to be used and for all waste.
- Use mobile storage e.g. racks on wheels (these only work well if the floors are in good condition and have non-slip surfaces as necessary).
- Have marked aisles that are kept clear at all times.
- Provide storage (home) for each tool and work item.