



Housekeeping

INTRODUCTION

We all spend time cleaning our homes and doing chores. These activities are so common they become a habit we perform without thinking. However, many people do not carry this habit over to their work environment. Housekeeping is not only a great practice at home and at work, but if performed properly, it can help to eliminate hazards and reduce the risk of accidents and injuries.

Housekeeping hazards and recommendations

Poor housekeeping can result in a number of hazards ranging from slips and falls to fires. Listed below are some of the hazards associated with inadequate housekeeping and actions that must be taken to mitigate them.

Slips, trips, and falls

Slips, trips and falls are common hazards often caused by inadequate housekeeping. These hazards can result in a number of injuries such as strains or sprains, broken bones and torn ligaments. A few recommendations to help minimize the chance of a slip, trip or fall are provided below.

- Clean up all spills immediately. If this is not possible, cover the spills with sand or another absorbent material and place signage at the location of the spill
- Coil up any lines when not in use and store them away from the walking path
- Walkway surfaces should be level and free of holes or dips
- Stow away tools or other equipment after use
- Scraps and debris should be immediately discarded and cleared from walkways and passages
- Close all drawers after use

Exits and safety equipment

The blockage of exits and safety equipment is another hazard created by inadequate housekeeping. Equipment cluttering the path to an exit or access to life saving equipment can result in injuries and even death. Some housekeeping tips related to egress and access are listed here.

- Evacuation routes should be kept clear at all times
- Emergency exits should never be blocked
- All lifesaving equipment should be easily accessible and not blocked by debris
- Access and protections to electrical panels or circuit panels should be kept clear
- Equipment or other materials should not be stowed in aisles, hallways or stairwells
- Items should not be stored on either side of a doorway

In addition to good housekeeping, well-designed and clear route markings (e.g. routes for pedestrians and vehicles) will also yield positive results.

Actual Near Miss

While completing a routine inspection of the ballast pumps, a small quantity of dirty rags were noticed at the bottom of a container. The rags had clearly been there for a while and they appeared to be stained with an oily residue, possibly posing a fire hazard. Good housekeeping practices must always be maintained, particularly when a hazard could result in fire or personnel injury. When work has been completed, all items that were used should be discarded or properly stored. Failure to practice good housekeeping skills can lead to hazardous conditions.



Machine safety

Good housekeeping is also important when working with or near machinery. A few helpful tips concerning housekeeping and machinery are provided below.

- The area around all machines or equipment should be kept clear of combustibles or any other debris
- Inspect all equipment before use, verify there are no noticeable hazards
- Verify that all guards or barriers are in place and operating properly
- In the case of maintenance or repair, verify that proper lockout-tagout procedures are in place and the procedures are followed
- Machines should be cleaned and all tools and housekeeping items should be stored or disposed of after each use

Electrical safety

Electrical hazards can also result from inadequate housekeeping and can lead to accidents and fires. A few suggestions that may mitigate electrical hazards associated with inadequate housekeeping are provided below.

- Inspect electrical cords before use and verify there are no frayed cords or spills near electrical outlets
- Don't overload plugs, outlets or circuits
- Keep combustibles away from electrical equipment
- Keep electrical equipment clean and free of noticeable hazards
- Do not pile electrical cords in a disorganized manner, e.g. tangled electrical cords
- Arrange ducting and layout of cords and provide protection for cables crossing walkways: this is valid for shipyards, manufacturers and office sites

Material handling

It is easy to be involved in an accident when a facility is in disarray. Add to this, carrying a load and the chance of injury increase further. Housekeeping tasks may involve the movement of heavy or awkwardly-shaped objects. When moving materials, keep the following tips in mind:

- Check your route and make a note of any hazards you encounter
- Verify that you have a firm grip on the objects
- Make sure you can see over the top of the load

Actual Injury Report

While hurrying to attend to mooring lines, a crewmember tripped over a bulwark ladder which was left on the bridge wing and suffered a broken leg. The cause of the accident was determined to be poor housekeeping and inadequate lighting. Additional lighting was added to the area and employees were reminded to stow away all tools and equipment when they were finished using them.

Discussion

- Report and discuss any incidents or observations pertaining to housekeeping with your supervisor