



Risktopics

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Country of Origin: United Kingdom

Housekeeping – Fire Safety

The need for good housekeeping standards cannot be over stated. Good housekeeping will contribute positively to improved fire safety as well as to the general health and safety standards of the business.

Good housekeeping standards include simple matters, such as the removal of rubbish, and encompass more fundamental aspects such as the general organisation of the premises and methods of monitoring. This ensures that established procedures are being carried out.

The following recommendations provide some best practice advice on how to maintain good standards of housekeeping.

Management Action

- A good housekeeping policy should be initiated by senior management so that the policy is seen as having due authority. Effective communication of its requirements is necessary, entailing delegation of responsibilities to line managers and supervisors and channels for feedback and review of procedures.
- An assessment of existing arrangements should be made to determine whether current procedures are satisfactory and that the necessary equipment and facilities are available.
- Areas where action is needed can then be identified and appropriate procedures established.

Layout

Overcrowding, or congestion, can be a major impediment to proper housekeeping, limiting access and preventing thorough cleaning.

- Layout of your premises should allow a logical, smooth, flow of work.
- Storage and production areas should, wherever possible, be segregated.
- Unobstructed access to escape routes and fire-fighting equipment should be maintained at all times.

- The use of suitable non-combustible partitioning, barriers or floor markings can be highly effective in defining segregated areas, or around potentially hazardous plant such as heating appliances or battery chargers.

Equipment

The absence of suitable cleaning equipment makes the task difficult and is a disincentive for employees to carry out their duties.

Proper equipment should be provided, ranging from brooms and vacuum cleaners to specialised motorised equipment, appropriate to the waste being handled.

Materials Handling and Storage

The provision of suitable handling and storage systems will maximise storage space, reduce congestion in working areas and can increase productivity by ensuring materials are readily to hand.

Unsuitable methods of material handling can present fire hazards. For example, the conveyance of flammable liquids by inappropriate means (i.e. in open containers) can lead to spillage of the liquid, allowing flammable vapours to be released.

- Racks, shelving or bins are preferred methods of general storage.
- Conveyor belt or roller systems should be considered as an alternative to manual handling.
- Special storage facilities should be provided for hazardous materials and packaging.
- Proprietary safety containers, and dispensers, should be used for carrying flammable liquids around the workplace.
- Maximum permitted storage heights should not be exceeded where sprinkler systems are installed.

Waste Control

Rubbish and waste can provide ready fuel for fire. Its proper handling and disposal is an important and integral part of the housekeeping process.

- Depending on the nature of the business, waste should be removed regularly (normally at least daily), and placed in appropriate receptacles. Non-combustible bins with lockable lids (ideally metal lids) or externally sited metal skips would normally be suitable.
- Dust may provide a significant explosion hazard when suspended in air, particularly if settled dusts are disturbed and become airborne. Fluff and fly accumulations from textile operations can also be easily ignited and allow rapid spread of fire. The risk of an explosion or fire may be substantially reduced by preventing the accumulation of dusts, fluff and fly. Settlement of such materials on ledges, sills, shelves, racking, plant and roof supports should be regularly cleared. Industrial vacuum cleaners should be used to avoid producing dust clouds during cleaning operations.
- Collected waste, awaiting removal, should be stored where it is not at risk of accidental or malicious ignition, or where it presents a threat to the property.
- The provision of continuous removal or extraction systems should be considered where large amounts of waste are produced.
- Combustible waste should be segregated from non-combustible waste. In particular flammable liquids, chemicals, or other hazardous materials may require special consideration.

- Rag wipes contaminated with flammable liquids are easily ignited and are hazardous when in contact with or in the proximity of ignition sources or hot surfaces. Wipes may also present a risk of spontaneous combustion. Any used wipes should be placed into metal bins, fitted with self-closing metal lids. These should be removed from the working area at the end of each working day, or shift, and be stored in a secure place.
- Waste burning introduces additional hazards and should not normally be done unless proper incineration facilities are provided.
- There should be written procedures for dealing with spillages of hazardous materials and appropriate training given.
- Specialist contractors may need to be employed to provide waste storage facilities and removal services.

Smoking

Smoking is a significant cause of fires and requires an appropriate degree of control. In the United Kingdom, current legislation bans smoking within the workplace. However, the hazards of illicit smoking need to be recognised and controls should therefore be carefully related to the severity of the risk.

- A total ban on smoking should apply throughout the premises where flammable or combustible materials (including waste) are stored or used. In less hazardous (external yard) areas it may be appropriate to designate smoking areas, or impose a ban during specified periods of the day, especially prior to the end of shifts.
- Wherever smoking is permitted, suitable receptacles should be provided for the safe disposal of smoking materials.
- Appropriate signage should be displayed, clearly denoting the controls in place.

External Areas

Combustible materials in the open present fire hazards, so good housekeeping in external areas is as important as within the premises.

- Goods stored outside should be kept well clear of buildings, the site boundary, major items of plant, flammable liquids, pressurised gases and hazardous chemicals.
- Heavy vegetation close to buildings or installations will need to be controlled. Care should be taken when using chemical weed-killers to avoid the use of those that present an enhanced fire risk, i.e. chlorate compounds. Proper arrangements should be made for the removal and safe disposal of waste. Burning should not be carried out.

Training

For a housekeeping programme to succeed it must be fully understood and supported by the workforce. Instruction and training, therefore, needs to be given to current employees and be included in induction training of new recruits.

Inspections

Monitoring of housekeeping by management enables standards to be maintained and demonstrates commitment to the policy.

- Periodic housekeeping and safety inspections should be conducted by your fire officer, line managers, supervisors, or other member of management who is responsible for fire safety, using a prepared checklist tailored to suit the premises and activities. A sample checklist is included within the Risk Solutions section of the Virtual Consulting website. This can be amended to suit your own particular circumstances.
- The checklist should be audited by senior management.
- A close-down check should be made at the end of each working day for smouldering smoking materials, electrical equipment unnecessarily left on, and site and building security.

Summary

Good housekeeping is an essential part of sound management practice and is also an effective means of fire prevention. Implementation of and adherence to these measures - where applicable - by all employees, can help to reduce your risk of fire.

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