

Housekeeping & Hygiene: 10 Things to Include in Your Workplace Housekeeping Policy



WHAT'S AT STAKE

'Housekeeping'

The word just doesn't work in an industrial setting. To your average worker, 'housekeeping' summons up maids and parents scolding kids for leaving their socks on the floor. 'Sanitation' and 'hygiene' sound weightier but are just as off-putting to workers. But while finding the suitable word to convey may be a challenge, the concept itself is crucial. In addition to being a legal requirement ([click here for the basic OHS requirements of each jurisdiction](#)), effective housekeeping in the workplace is imperative to safety, productivity and profitability to the extent it:

Minimizes	Maximizes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Slip, trip and fall hazards> Risks of struck-by injuries> Risks of being hit by flying objects or debris<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Fire hazards> Worker exposure to dusts, vapours, fumes and other airborne hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Efficient use of physical work space<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Efficient storage> Efficient flow of materials & personnel<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Efficient use of tools and machinery> Ease of cleanup, maintenance and waste disposal> Quality of environmental conditions

IMPORTANCE OF THE POLICY

Housekeeping isn't just cleanliness and picking up your dirty socks. It's a

mind-set as well as a practical strategy that must be implemented on a day-to-day and even hour-to-hour basis. It requires specificity, discipline and attention to detail. If you try and freelance, it'll never work. What you need is a carefully written housekeeping policy.

THE 10 THINGS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR HOUSEKEEPING POLICY

It's imperative to design your housekeeping policy around the unique characteristics of your workplace in regard to physical space, operations, materials handled, equipment used, etc. But while the idea of a one-size-fits-all is laughable, there are best practices for designing and deciding what to include in a workplace housekeeping policy. To the extent it incorporates many of these best practices, the OHSI Model Policy is a good starting point for creating your own policy (or vetting the one you already have).

Like our Model, yours should include the following 10 elements:

1. Statement of Purpose

Start by describing why the policy was created, i.e., to establish clear standards and rules to ensure that the workplace is kept in a safe, neat, sanitary and orderly condition at all times [Policy, Sec. 1].

2. Policy Statement

A strong policy statement can help you 'sell' the policy by explaining what workers get out of good housekeeping, namely, the chance to do their job safely and efficiently. Conversely, describe the bad things that can happen to workers if housekeeping is poor, namely, increased risk of injury and illness [Policy, Sec. 2].

3. Definition of 'Housekeeping'

Keeping in mind the context and negative associations that the word may conjure up among workers, you need to specifically define what 'housekeeping' is. Make it clear that you're talking not just about cleanliness but a regular, proactive discipline dedicated to keeping work areas neat, orderly and free of hazards for the purposes of protecting everybody's health and safety [Policy, Sec. 3].

4. Workers Your Policy Is Designed to Protect

Make it clear that the policy is designed to protect any and all workers who have a stake in ensuring that the workplace is kept safe, clean, neat, orderly and free of hazards, including not just your own company's full- and part-time employees but also:

- Temporary employees placed by an outside agency who work at your site;
- Contract labourers hired to work at your site;
- Volunteers who work at your site for free; and
- Workers employed by the company's constructors, contractors, and subcontractors who work at your site.

[Policy, Sec. 4]

5. Roles & Responsibilities

List the housekeeping-related roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders under your policy, including at a minimum.

- Company owners, officers, directors and other principals who would be considered 'employers' under your jurisdiction's OHS laws [Policy, Sec. 5.1];
- The EHS officer/manager or other individual(s) in charge of running your OHS program [Policy, Sec. 5.2];
- Supervisors, foremen, lead-hands, etc. [Policy, Sec. 5.3]; and
- Workers [Policy, Sec. 5.4];

You may also want to extend this part of your policy to include members of the workplace joint health and safety committee (JHSC) or health and safety representative and visitors.

6. General Housekeeping Standards

Now we come to the heart of the policy, the actual housekeeping standards you expect to be maintained in the workplace. Get into the nitty-gritty details including with regard to: ([Click here for a Model Housekeeping Checklist](#))

- Vacuuming, cleaning and removal of dirt and debris from floors, working surfaces, stairways, passages, platforms, entrances and exits;
- Keeping the above areas dry, clean and free of clutter, obstructions and tripping hazards;
- Cleaning and maintenance of eating and other work areas;
- When and how often different work areas are checked and by whom;
- Stacking, piling, shelving and storage of different materials ;
- Checking mats, pads, rugs, and other items on the floor for hazardous ripples, curling, and other tripping hazards;
- Keeping fire exits, fire alarms, pull stations, hose cabinets and fire extinguishers free of obstructions and readily accessible at all times;
- Fire exits remain free and clear of obstruction and are readily accessible at all times;
- Indoor and outdoor lighting;
- Keeping outdoor areas, entries and exits dry and free of snow and ice accumulations;
- Spill control and cleanup procedures;
- Waste disposal measures;
- Inspection, maintenance and servicing of tools and equipment;
- Inspection procedures and schedules; and
- Implementation of repairs, equipment removals and other corrective actions.

[Policy, Sec. 6]

7. Indoor Smoking Rules

While you can also include it as a separate policy, we incorporate indoor smoking rules into our housekeeping policy. Although the specific rules must track the actual legislation of your particular province and municipality, in most cases it will be appropriate 'if not outright mandatory' to ban tobacco use, including cannabis smoking and vaping, in:

- Enclosed spaces in which workers perform their employment duties;
- Eating areas, washrooms and restrooms;

- Adjacent corridors, lobbies, stairwells, elevators, escalators or other common areas frequented by workers in the course of their employment; and
- Company vehicles and other vehicles used by workers in the course of their employment carrying at least one passenger.

The policy should also require the posting of No Smoking signs and removal of ashtrays and other smoking receptacles in areas where smoking is banned [Policy, Sec. 7].

8. Requirements for Contractors & Subcontractors

Your policy should include provisions requiring contractors and subcontractors hired at your site to comply with your housekeeping requirements. How you do that depends on the contractor's status under your jurisdiction's OHS laws:

- Ordinary contractors and subcontractors hired to work at your site and thus presumably subject to your control should be required to agree to follow your housekeeping policy and ensure their workers do likewise;
- Constructors (aka prime contractors) hired to control a project at your work site and assume primary responsibility for ensuring that work complies with OHS requirements should be required to either:
 - Directly follow your housekeeping policy; or
 - Adopt and implement their own housekeeping policy that complies with OHS rules and provides at least equivalent protection to workers as your policy does.

[Policy, Sec. 8]

9. Training

State that you will provide education and training to all of your workers affected by this policy to ensure they understand and are qualified to carry out their responsibilities under the policy [Policy, Sec. 9].

10. Monitoring

Finally, indicate that you will evaluate your housekeeping practices during the monthly workplace inspection and in the course of regular job observations. In addition, you should review the policy at least once a year and on an immediate basis in response to significant changes in work circumstances or conditions and/or incidents and other red flags suggesting that the policy isn't working and needs to be reviewed. You may have to perform such review in consultation with your JHSC or health and safety representative, depending on your jurisdiction's OHS laws [Policy, Sec. 10].