

The Importance of Good Housekeeping in Your Workplace



By Barbara Semeniuk, BSc CRSP

It's the beginning of the new year and we all make resolutions. I have an excellent plan for keeping mine: do the things that are bad for me and more of them. So this year I intend to be more of a couch potato, watching TV and eating lots of junk food. Yes, these are the kinds of resolutions I can keep.

But seriously, when it comes to New Year's resolutions, do as I say and not as I do. And what I say is that one of the best workplace safety resolutions you can make is to improve your housekeeping.

An Occupational Health and Safety officer once told me he can tell the value management places on health and safety by the housekeeping. Good housekeeping = high value placed on health and safety; bad housekeeping...well, you get the picture.

Poor housekeeping can result in cords, protruding objects and debris strewn across the floor, which can cause trips, slips and falls—some of the most common workplace injuries. These kinds of injuries can happen as readily in an office as in an industrial work environment.

So what should you do? Try to eliminate hoses, cords and

frayed rugs. For example, in an office, switch to wireless mice, which have no cords at all. (Isn't technology wonderful') If you can't eliminate cords and hoses, then contain them and keep them out of walkways and paths.

When space is an issue, the emergency exits are often the first to be blocked because they're seen as wasted or unused space. For example, it may be tempting to store boxes, supplies, etc. near or in front of an emergency exit so they're out of the way. But blocked exits can impede escape during an emergency, which can have catastrophic results. So make sure that emergency exits are kept clean and clear of clutter.

Here are some more housekeeping tips:

- Keep cleaning supplies, especially those in aerosol cans or that contain hazardous chemicals, in their proper place, such as a vented, fire proof metal cabinet.
- Watch the accumulation of water on all outdoor work sites, because it's a slipping hazard. Water should be sucked or squeegeed away.
- Ensure your parking lots and walkways are salted and sanded to prevent ice from accumulating and slips.
- Keep stairs at your workplace free of clutter and trip hazards. Nothing should be stored on a staircase.
- Floors should be cleaned regularly to remove grease, oil and any other substances that could cause a worker to slip and fall.
- It's easy for workers to get injured by tools just laying around or tossed wherever when a worker is done with them. So require workers to put away their hand tools in the proper place. The Japanese use the 5 S approach, which roughly translated means everything has a place and there's a place for everything. For example, drawings or silhouettes of tools such as hammers and wrenches on a pegboard can ensure the tools are put in the appropriate places.

- First aid rooms and related areas, such as eyewash stations and showers, should be clean and as sanitary as possible. And the water should be regularly tested to ensure it's not rusty or foul.

In short, good housekeeping is one of the best—and simplest—things you can do to reduce injuries and incidents in your workplace. Happy 2012, readers. I must get back to my couch and watch some mindless TV...I have resolutions to keep!

Ms. Barbara Semeniuk BSc. CRSP is President of [Purcell Enterprises Ltd.](#), a loss control management firm that specializes in health and safety auditing, and a member of the OHS Insider Board of Advisors. If you wish to discuss this article, call her at 780-951-0867 or email her at bls1284@telus.net.

More Housekeeping Resources

Click here for a [Model Housekeeping Checklist](#) you can adapt and use to ensure that your workplace's housekeeping efforts are up to snuff. And go to SafetySmart.com, where you'll find more resources on housekeeping and workplace safety, such as safety talks for workers on the importance of good housekeeping.