

HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE

Issue No. 2

Good Housekeeping

Poor 'housekeeping' (an arguably misnamed and archaic term) is at the root of many costly workplace accidents each year. In fact, according to the HSE, 50% of all slips and trips are caused by bad housekeeping, so making sure your working area is clear would eliminate a large number of accidents.

Effective solutions however, are often simple, cheap and once embraced and embedded in a company's culture, can have a positive impact on the overall health and safety performance, often leading to other benefits.

Implementing 'good housekeeping standards' means that premises are kept free from slip, trip, fall and vehicle collision hazards and are maintained in a clean as well as tidy condition.

This promotes a safe and hygienic working environment for all employees and also shows visitors to the premises that corporate standards are of the highest order.



An example of poor housekeeping in a workshop – you can see that this work area is full of potential hazards.



An example of good housekeeping in a warehouse

The voice of steel distribution

Some of the 'knock-on' effects of poor housekeeping standards can be:

- **Falling Objects** (unsafe, 'freestanding' stacks. Overstocking).
- **Vehicle Impacts** (insufficient space to manoeuvre/restricted visibility).
- **Slips & Trips** (clutter in walkways, on stairs. Spillages).
- **Manual Handling** (poor posture and environment, restricted space).
- **Falls From Height** (restricted, cluttered space, falls from vehicle bed).
- **Fire** (excessive flammable material, blocked fire routes and exits).

A case study due to sloppy housekeeping standards helps illustrate the point:

Company 'X' had an accident resulting in uninsured costs to the business of £165,000 (fines, downtime, lost contract, etc).

The company's profit margin was 5%.

The sales required to recoup the above loss = £3,300,000.

Also of note, according to research published by the HSE the cost of putting a plaster on a cut finger is £42. This includes

- Stopping work/switching off a machine/slowing down production, etc = time;
- Finding a first aider/first aid kit/washing/treating wound/affixing plaster = time;
- Going back to work/machine/restating job, etc = time;
- First aider recording/reporting accident, etc = time;
- First aider's own downtime whilst treating/reporting injury, etc = time;
- Management team recording/discussing/monthly accident stats/risk assessment review, etc = time.
- Time = money!

Therefore, by setting 'the company standard' and operating an 'everything in its place and a place for everything' culture and ensuring all areas of the premises are walked regularly, e.g. on a weekly basis, timely visual monitoring checks may spot and prevent that 'accident waiting to happen.'

DISCLAIMER: This is the opinion of the NASS H&S Committee but only the courts can interpret the law. All employers should refer to the legislation.