

## Fire Safety and Housekeeping

Good housekeeping is essential to fire safety regardless of the industrial occupancy. Housekeeping is the maintenance of an orderly, clean and neat work place. Good housekeeping practices, both indoors and outdoors, reduce the danger of fire. They can control the presence of unwanted fuels, obstructions and sources of ignition that can create extremely hazardous exposures for the business

### Principles of good Housekeeping

Housekeeping consists of the simpler aspects of building care and maintenance:

- Maintaining operational tidiness and order,
- Properly controlled waste
- Regulating activities such as preventing aisle storage that can lead to hazardous conditions.

Housekeeping requires organisation and continuous monitoring to be successful.

### Responsibility of Housekeeping

No matter what the operation, work activity creates waste materials and obstructions to orderly movement throughout the premises. It is essential every organisation has a system for removing them. It is not enough to let waste accumulate and to remove them when they become unwieldy or a nuisance.

It is essential to develop a disciplined approach to housekeeping practises, so that workers remove debris and rubbish regularly and store equipment and materials neatly.

In a large organisation, management usually assigns housekeeping to a maintenance staff charged with the routines involved with housekeeping and maintenance. Management must still communicate how important and urgent good housekeeping routines are if efforts are to be effective. Without direct and rigorous management support, housekeeping goals and objectives can become a low priority.



In a smaller organisation without maintenance staff, good housekeeping is more an individual effort, yet the principles are the same. Management must lead workers and convey them how important vigorous and systematic attention to orderliness and cleanliness.

## Basics of Good Housekeeping

There are three factors required for good housekeeping:

### 1. Adequate space, proper layout and equipment

A better arrangement of space can improve the levels of housekeeping considerably.

### 2. Correct materials handling and storage

Lack of adequate equipment to move and arrange materials in convenient storage areas results in haphazard storage. This can result in blocked exit paths and obstruct access to fire control equipment. Poorly organised storage may result in the collection of debris and trash in neglected corners and cul-de-sacs.

### 3. Cleanliness and orderliness

No matter what the occupancy, an organisation can immeasurably improve the level of fire safety by paying attention to the need to keep all areas as clean and neat as possible. Management must support workers by providing efficient and timely waste removal programs.

Good housekeeping is sure to ensue when the organisation establishes routines for these three factors.

- **Coatings and lubricants** – good housekeeping requires the removal of combustible residues. Non-sparking tools should be used
- **Oily waste on rags, sawdust, clothing etc** and in particular those susceptible to spontaneous combustion should be in appropriate waste containers and emptied daily.

## The Inspection Checklist

An inspection checklist should be created to record housekeeping considerations that are applicable to your organisation. A section should be included for action follow-up to prevent reoccurrence of dangerous conditions. The frequency of the inspections should be determined by senior management and according to the hazards presented. It is suggested that this is either weekly or monthly and that it covers all areas of the site.

The Checklists should be kept for auditing purposes.

## Guidance and useful information

QBE Fire safety and housekeeping inspection checklist.

**For further guidance and general enquiries contact: [RS@uk.qbe.com](mailto:RS@uk.qbe.com).**

## Outdoor Housekeeping

Good housekeeping outdoors is as important as it is inside buildings. Accumulation of storage, waste or even overgrown vegetation can present a fire load sufficient to cause damage to buildings or outdoor equipment.

Organisations should locate storage areas at sufficient distances from buildings to prevent fire spread. Idle pallets are particularly susceptible to severe fires. A distance of 10m is a minimum requirement for most outdoor storage. Please contact a QBE Risk Manager for advice as required.

## Other Hazards

Other housekeeping considerations:

- **Drip pans** are essential to many operations. Pans should be non-combustible and spills should be handled using oil absorbing compounds like diatomaceous earth which is preferable to sawdust or sand
- **Flammable liquid spills** – materials should be on hand to deal with this. Workers should be trained in the appropriate response
- **Flammable liquid waste disposal** should be in appropriate containers until proper offsite disposal can take place

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