



When I Go Into a Workplace, the First Thing I Consider Is Housekeeping.

Insights

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Whether I am auditing a facility or on site to defend against OSHA, labor and employment matters, housekeeping is quite literally the first thing that I consider ... and in 30 years, I have yet to find an occasion that poor housekeeping did not translate to or foreshadow a variety of cultural, leadership, and compliance problems. There is always a good standard of housekeeping, even if one is at a waterlogged mud hole of a construction site or an alloy plant. No company is exempt from a requirement to maintain good housekeeping, although the standard for a cement plant is a tad different than for technology-based employer.

The Legal Standard

OSHA maintains standards on a wide variety of bathroom-related and hygiene issues for general industry, construction and other settings. OSHA seldom cites to these standards, but when they do, either the employer forgot that a bathroom was still in use or they truly do not care about employees. Employers should not underestimate the effect of filthy restrooms, and especially showers, on morale. Such issues are often a key complaint in union drives. However, filthy bathrooms are a more specific issue, I'm talking about how a construction site looks when you drive on site or a plant floor as you enter the aisles.

OSHA's standard 1910.22(a)(1) states that:

All places of employment, passageways, storerooms, and service rooms shall be kept clean and orderly and in a sanitary condition.

OSHA also maintains standards on a variety of walking and working surfaces, access to extinguishers and electric panels, or related to egress and exit such as starting at 1910.33. As you might expect, OSHA's principal focus is on trip hazards, exposed nails and sharp objects, blocked access, combustible dust accumulation, etc. Let's be candid, when an OSHA Compliance Officer sees lousy housekeeping, you know that he will more closely scrutinize training and audit requirements, lock out and handling chemicals. The CO figures that if you don't care enough to fix broken control room windows, pick up discarded broken tools, or stage materials properly on a job site, you aren't likely to ring the bell with your powered industrial truck training. And it looks bad when you get cited for "housekeeping," especially if it really is for sanitary reasons. One's site has to be pretty nasty to earn the sobriquet of a 1910.22(a)(1) citation where no trip or similar hazard is

presented. By the way, the blocked exit, fire extinguisher on the floor-type items have cost many retailers hundreds of thousands in OSHA citations.

Why Housekeeping Is So Often a Problem

The answer, as to so many questions, is largely a combination of, “*we don’t have time,*” “*management doesn’t care,*” and “*for !@#\$\$% sake, we’re a foundry, not a hospital!*”

Consequences of Poor Housekeeping

Go back to the NYC “*Broken Window*” philosophy of policing. Housekeeping sets the tone. If the workplace doesn’t focus on housekeeping, employees, vendors and others will not care about it, or any other area requiring purposeful action and not narrowly related to “production.” So, one can absolutely assume that continuous quality improvement won’t readily occur, and safety processes will be written procedures with little day to day effect on work.

Poor housekeeping is expensive

Some construction studies conclude that on a “*messy*” jobsite, materials get moved and restaged six to seven times for no good reason.

How are you going to inculcate “*accountability*” in your frontline supervision, and how will you build an engaged employee culture where employees do the “*right thing*” regardless of whether someone is watching them. Seemingly little things matter

Are you really committed to maintaining a pro-employee union-free atmosphere or a collaborative relationship with your unions? Really? Here’s great quotation from Phil La Duke:

According to best selling author and employee engagement expert Dr. Paul Marciano, employee engagement is about respect; workers who feel respected by their employers are far more likely to be engaged than those who feel disrespected. Good housekeeping is a key indicator of respect; you can easily gauge the level of respect employers have for their workers — and how workers about themselves — simply by looking at their housekeeping practices.

We’ll quote some more effects of poor housekeeping from Phil La Duke’s recent article, [“Your Mother Doesn’t Work Here, Why Housekeeping Matters.”](#)

The dangers of poor housekeeping are real. It saps productivity, morale and operating efficiency, yet goes largely ignored. When every competitive dollar counts, it’s puzzling that more shops don’t make a concerted effort to address a problem that is so easy to fix.

MATERIALS MANAGEMENT Housekeeping discipline is a subset of operational discipline. A strong commitment to housekeeping can address inventory management and control (clearing stock out of the aisles and removing and disposing of scrap and obsolete equipment and stock, for example.)

SALES When you seriously attack housekeeping, you will find that your workplace will look less like an episode of hoarders and more like a world-class operation. I know of a manufacturer that does a fair amount of work for the U.S. government. The G-men were generally pleased with the quality, cost, and delivery of the products the shop built, but were consistently disappointed by the physical condition of the plant: the facility was cramped and crowded with trash and stock strewn around the production area; it simply didn't look very professional

MAINTENANCE

One of the biggest offenders of poor housekeeping is the maintenance department. Often, removing obsolete equipment or fixtures, cleaning dross or offal, or just plain picking up after oneself is seemingly impossible for many maintenance workers. The clutter caused by poor housekeeping practices on the part of maintenance is truly embarrassing in some organizations.

EFFICIENCY It's just plain easier to get things done in a neat and well-organized work area. In addition to preventing incidents, good housekeeping saves space, time, and money.

Action Points

- Become purposeful. Define "*good housekeeping*," make a written plan, establish cleaning schedules, build an accountability structure, and add housekeeping categories to self-audits. Do not assume that your normal housekeeping employees or operators will just get it done.
- Train supervisors to be sensitive as to issues which destroy morale and a productive culture. Come up with supervisor-driven processes for them to discuss these issues. Include housekeeping in employee attitude surveys.
- Use housekeeping as an early warning sign for a host of labor and employment issues.

"Cleanliness is next to ... profit."

Howard