

Safety Alert

Keeping a Clean and Safe Office

The office environment is more than simply furniture placement. The environment of an office includes issues such as cleanliness, order, and maintenance. Injuries in office settings often come about because the "housekeeping" of the office has become slack, or if an excessive amount of paper, products or other materials create a daunting environment. Cleanliness and good housekeeping can also reduce allergic reactions to dust/mold and prevent illness such as the flu or a virus.

Hazards

Piles

Papers and materials are on the floor or piled precariously on desks and tables can become a hazard. In addition to the level of stress that accompanies an untidy office, the paper menace is a safety hazard in that it is highly flammable (particularly if stored next to an electrical outlet) and also has the potential of falling off shelves or file cabinets and injuring passersby. A single sheet of paper on the floor can create a slip hazard.

Rest Room Sanitation

Rest Rooms should be cleaned and sanitized at least once a day. Paper should not be permitted to litter the floor. Bath tissue, soap and paper towels should be available in adequate supplies. Never light a candle or use air fresheners to eliminate odors in a rest room. Candles have an open flame and air fresheners can "trigger" allergic attacks for some employees.

Toxic Chemicals

Storage of toxic chemicals and cleaning supplies can be problematic particularly if chemicals are reactive if combined. Chemicals should be stored in separate closet or cabinet from cleaning supplies. Beware of chemicals such as linseed oil, which can spontaneously combust.

Cleaning Supplies

Cleaning supplies, such as dry erase board cleaners, should be clearly marked and stored in spill-proof containers. If the office has young visitors, these products should also be stored above counter-level to avoid potential danger. The phone number of the local poison control office should be clearly posted within the work areas.

Kitchen, Coffee Area and Food

- Dirt, grime and garbage if left to accumulate can create health hazards and spread disease. Have sufficient trash receptacles located in kitchens, break rooms and other locations where food is consumed.
- Kitchens and coffee preparation areas need to be clean and floors maintained. Spills on the counters or floors need to be mopped up promptly. Injuries can be sustained from slips and falls on wet floors.
- Kitchen and coffee preparation area counters need to be clean and free from spills and grime.
- Refrigerators should be cleaned out at least once a week, and stoves/microwaves need to be wiped down after each use.

- Trash must be properly disposed on a daily basis to avoid attracting insects, mice, rats and other vermin. Rotting food, even in a refrigerator, is a health hazard.
- Staff should be discouraged from consuming food in places that are not specifically designated for food consumption. If staff consumes food at their desks the food waste should be disposed in appropriate receptacles to avoid attracting mice, rats and other vermin.

Office Housekeeping Checklist

Yes	No	
		Standards of cleanliness should be put into place for each office and/or work cubicle. Staff performance objectives should include a requirement to maintain a clean workspace.
		Identify cleanliness and safety expectations for all staff—for example—spills, particularly liquids spilled on the floor, need to be wiped up immediately.
		Kitchens, including refrigerators, are cleaned at least once a week.
		Bathrooms are cleaned on a daily basis, and supplies, such as bath tissue, are replenished.
		There are adequate trash receptacles to accommodate the amount of trash generated on a daily basis.
		Trash and garbage is disposed of at least once a day.
		Papers and other materials are filed at least weekly.
		Countertops, phones and desktops are cleaned on a routine basis.
		Cleaning supplies and toxic materials are in clearly marked closed containers and stored in separate locations.
		Floors, carpets and upholstered furniture are vacuumed at least weekly.
		Dust is minimized to reduce the potential for allergic reaction.
		Water is not allowed to stand and/or drip to prevent the formation of mold and mildew.
		Tile floors are washed on a weekly basis

Source:

Oliver, Barbara B., *Managing Facility Risks—10 Steps to Safety*, Nonprofit Risk Management Center, Washington, DC, 2004