

SAFETY SOLUTIONS

HOUSEKEEPING



LEE SIZEMORE

Is housekeeping a primary focus on your job sites? A clean and well-organized job site elevates your company in the eyes of the owner as professional and efficient, creates a harmonious atmosphere among the workforce, and improves productivity and quality. All of this adds up to an improved bottom line. In my opinion, however, the most important reason for a mandated

housekeeping program is **safety**.

Everybody in the workforce, from laborers to skilled trades to supervisors and executives, must recognize that housekeeping and general cleanliness have a direct effect on safety and health. It is the responsibility of everybody on the site. Housekeeping is not an additional duty—it is part of the job. All employees must be trained to know good housekeeping practices, recognize unsafe conditions, and take action to eliminate hazards immediately.

Due to the nature of our work, concrete and masonry repair sites are especially susceptible to hazardous conditions created by poor housekeeping practices. We create large quantities of broken concrete, brick, reinforcing steel, dust, and dirt. We use water to keep our dust down. We drag air hoses, electrical cords, welding leads, and oxygen and acetylene lines around our sites. We often use ladders and scaffolds to access our work. We use hazardous and flammable materials and chemicals. We often have equipment such as skids, steer loaders, forklifts, and georgia buggies operating in the area. All of these can contribute to multiple work-site hazards, including, but not limited to:

- Slips, trips, and falls;
- Workers being struck by falling objects;
- Cuts, abrasions, contusions, and punctures;
- Fire hazards; and
- Workers being exposed to harmful vapors and dust.

The development of a good housekeeping program should begin with guidance from the OSHA regulation and build from there. OSHA addresses housekeeping in Subpart C—General Safety and Health Provisions as follows:

1926.25(A)

During the course of construction, alteration, or repairs, form and scrap lumber with protruding nails and all other debris shall be kept cleared from work areas, passageways, and stairs, in and around buildings or other structures.

1926.25(B)

Combustible scrap and debris shall be removed at regular intervals during the course of construction. Safe means shall be provided to facilitate such removal.

1926.25(C)

Containers shall be provided for the collection and separation of waste, trash, oily and used rags, and other refuse. Containers used for garbage and other oily, flammable, or hazardous wastes, such as caustics, acids, harmful dusts, etc., shall be equipped with covers. Garbage and other waste shall be disposed of at frequent and regular intervals.

In my opinion, we should also include the following OSHA standard for illumination in our discussion of housekeeping.

1926.26

Construction areas, aisles, stairs, ramps, runways, corridors, offices, shops, and storage areas where work is in progress shall be lighted with either natural or artificial illumination. The minimum illumination requirements for work areas are contained in Subpart D of this section.

In addition, the General Duty Clause of the Occupational Safety and Health Act requires employers to provide a workplace free of recognized hazards. Housekeeping hazards clearly fall into the category of “recognized hazards.”

I won’t go into specific rules for housekeeping here; there are usually general housekeeping rules in your safety programs, and there are many examples available on the Internet or through your insurance company or safety consultant. Just remember the “recognized hazards” as you build your housekeeping program. The following steps should get you started:

- Train employees to recognize hazards;
- Hold all employees accountable for housekeeping—not just supervisors; and
- Establish general and site-specific housekeeping rules for waste storage and handling, material storage and handling, work areas, and equipment and tool use and storage.

A good housekeeping program will greatly reduce or eliminate many hazards in the workplace, protecting both the workers and the public. Increasing your bottom line by having a clean, safe, and well-organized job site and remembering safety and cleanliness are not just for the job site—the rules apply at our offices and homes as well. I once turned the corner in our office, tripped on a box somebody left in the hallway, and knocked myself out cold. Clean as you go!

ICRI Committee 120, Environmental Health and Safety, would like to recognize Lee Sizemore of Monson Nicholas, Inc., for his contributions to this column.