# Bad Housekeeping Can Bring Unthinkable Consequences




## What’s at Stake

Some people can’t stand a mess, while others leave an evidence trail of poor housekeeping everywhere they go. But in the workplace, bad housekeeping can have consequences that go far beyond creating an image of a sloppily run, unprofessional operation.

## What’s the Danger

Poor housekeeping causes a wide range of injuries and fatalities, ranging from painful slips, trips and falls, to workers being unable to evacuate burning buildings because of blocked fire exits, to dust explosions that can claim multiple lives in an instant.

## Example

The lead singer and guitarist of a popular band was participating in a game show in Japan when he fell head-first from a slippery and wet stage to the floor below. He suffered severe brain injuries and died several days later.

And dust explosions, many of which are linked to poor housekeeping, have claimed more than 100 workers’ lives and injured about 600 others across the US since the early 1980s, according to the US Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board.

## How to Protect Yourself

The possibilities for injury or death in a cluttered workplace are many. Workers can slip on spilled material that hasn’t been cleaned up, trip over debris on a floor, hurt themselves while walking past heavy or sharp objects that are protruding from shelves or be struck by unsecured items that shift and fall from racking.

If sawdust, sugar or other material is left to accumulate on surfaces and it comes in contact with an ignition source, it can cause a deadly explosion and

fire.

It is neither safe nor practical for you to sweep dust off a beam high in the air in your workplace. If you are concerned about a buildup of combustible dust and the potential for an explosion, talk to your supervisor.

As a worker, there’s plenty you can do on the ground to keep yourself and your co-workers safe. While it can be annoying to see someone create a mess such as a spill and walk away from it, ignoring that mess yourself is wrong because it puts everyone in danger.

The few seconds it takes to mop up a coffee spill on the floor or sweep up some wood chips and sawdust can make a huge difference to the safety of your workplace. But if you don’t know what the spilled material is, talk to your supervisor before attempting to clean it up.

Here are some other important housekeeping tips to remember and practice:

- When you are finished using tools or material, return them to their proper place and clean up anything that is left sitting on work surfaces or floors.
- If you observe materials protruding from shelving that could either fall onto workers or injure anyone walking by, push them back or if they are too large to handle or cannot be repositioned so they fit on the shelf, report them to your supervisor.
- Ensure that all walkways are free of obstructions such as materials, tools, or wires that could cause someone to trip or fall.
- Never stack material to a height where it becomes unstable and might fall.
- If emergency exit routes are blocked by material, inform your supervisor.
- Don’t leave garbage hanging around. Trash should be taken to a dumpster at the end of the shift.
- Dispose of oily rags in covered metal containers. These containers need to be emptied on a regular basis.
- Ensure that fire extinguishers and sprinkler systems are not blocked by equipment or materials.

## Final Word

*Some people are neat and others are messy. How you keep your home is up to you, but you are not free to create messes in the workplace that could result in your own or other workers’ injury or worse. Keep things neat, for safety’s sake.*