Safe Work Practices for Janitors



Janitors perform a variety of necessary jobs. The jobs they do can vary not only by activity but also by location. The activity being performed and where it’s being performed can present different hazard exposures.

Before you undertake janitorial work, make sure you’ve been trained in how to do each task safely and correctly to prevent an injury to yourself or others.

As a janitor, you should be dressed appropriately for all work you will perform. In general, you should wear comfortable, slip-resistant shoes, long-sleeved shirts and long pants; wear chemical-resistant gloves and splash goggles when pouring, mixing, and using chemicals; use work gloves to protect your hands when doing odd jobs; and wear safety glasses to protect your eyes from splashes, debris, or dust. Ask your employer about any additional safety or protective measures you should employ for specific work exposures. For good personal hygiene, always wash your hands before eating or smoking and between tasks.

Janitorial tasks often require lifting, pushing, pulling, material handling, and repetitive motions. Know what you can safely lift, practice proper lifting techniques, and ask for help with heavy or awkward loads. To avoid back strain and sprain injuries, keep your muscles strong and stretch before, during, and after work. If you’ll be working at heights, follow safe climbing and/or ladder procedures. If possible, rotate tasks throughout your work shift or take mini breaks to prevent mental or physical fatigue.

Floor maintenance, a common janitorial activity, is more safely performed when fewer people are around. Use proper posture and try to avoid gripping handles too tightly when mopping and sweeping. Be especially cautious around hot water used for cleaning. Inspect floor machines and vacuums daily and keep cords coiled and close to you to prevent slip, trip, or fall incidents. Mark with caution signs or block off areas with wet floors or spills.

Hand trucks, rolling buckets, and housekeeping carts are often used to move heavy loads and keep supplies close for access. To move them without straining your body, keep the equipment and rolling wheels in good condition; keep the load in front of you; and, if you have the choice, push the load in the direction you’re going using your body weight rather than pull the load, which may cause a body strain. Remember to watch for people, obstacles, slopes, and drop offs in your path!

Read the safety data sheets (SDS) of any chemical you plan to use to clean, disinfect, or strip surfaces. Stay in well-ventilated areas and never mix chemicals unless instructed to do so by the manufacturer. As industrial chemicals are often concentrated, know the proper mix ratio and application.

Wear work gloves and carry the load away from your body when removing and disposing garbage, recycling, paper, and debris; refuse bags may contain broken glass, sharps items, or contaminated needles. Never reach into a garbage can with your bare hands nor pack garbage down with your feet!

Know the common hazards in your work environment. If you should spot a hazard in the workplace, mark it for others to be alerted, and report it immediately.