

IT'S A
RISKY
BUSINESS

Dangers
lurk in every workplace



CLEANING

! Safe Maintenance

Saves Time >> Saves Money >> Saves Lives

hseni
CONTROLLING RISK TOGETHER

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District Councils



What is cleaning?

Cleaning is an essential task in all workplaces. It is necessary to keep buildings and equipment safe and well maintained in addition to providing a pleasant working environment for visitors and employees alike.

All businesses will carry out some forms of cleaning activity, including:

- **Scheduled routine cleaning**
e.g floor polishing at the end of the working day or periodic deep cleaning of grease extract systems.
- **Reactive, unplanned cleaning**
e.g mopping up a spill or removing foreign matter from industrial equipment.
- **Specialist cleaning**
such as cleaning out gutters, dismantling complex equipment or cleaning in dangerous conditions e.g flammable atmospheres, confined spaces or at height.

Cleaning activities may be carried out **in-house** by employees or may be **contracted out** to external cleaning firms or specialist contractors.



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So what's the problem?

Every year, there are a number of accidents resulting from cleaning activities. Many are serious and some are even fatal. Given the number of people involved in cleaning and the diversity of the activities, it is therefore not surprising that cleaning is a relatively hazardous work activity.



In 2011 in Northern Ireland there were 86 accidents involving cleaners or cleaning companies that required the injured person to be off work for 3 days or more. 15 of these resulted in major injuries for those involved.

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What do I need to do?

- Look at all the cleaning activities that take place, decide what could cause risks, and how.
- Consider what can be done to prevent or reduce these risks.
- Check whether any of these measures are in place already.
- Decide whether more needs to be done.
- Then do it!

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How to control the risks from cleaning activities

This list is not exhaustive: depending on the type of cleaning required there may be other risks which require consideration such as weather extremes, vulnerable workers, fire and explosion, collapse of fragile structures and entry into confined spaces.

Risk		Controls
	<p>Workers and others risk injuries such as fractures and bruising if they trip over objects or slip on spillages or on wet floors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clean floors and equipment outside of working hours where possible• Clean up spillages immediately and keep work areas tidy• Do not leave cleaning equipment unattended• Train staff in safe systems of work• Devise a procedure for managing contractors• Display appropriate safety signage• All areas should be well lit
	<p>Cleaning activities can expose individuals to a range of risks such as cleaning chemicals, asbestos fibres, silica dust and bodily fluids, which may present inhalation and skin/eye contact risks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Substitute cleaning chemicals for safer alternatives where possible• Check material safety data sheets for chemical use, storage and disposal• Establish safe cleaning procedures and train staff• Devise a procedure for managing contractors• Check the Asbestos register to determine if areas to be cleaned contain Asbestos
	<p>Workers risk serious injury, fractures or even death if they fall from any height.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use the right equipment for the right job (Ladders should only be used for short duration work i.e. less than 30 minutes)• Work at height should be avoided if possible e.g. by using long-handed tools that can be operated from the ground• Consider alternative methods for work at height e.g. tower scaffold, cherry picker, airport steps, scissor lift• Request a method statement from contractors working at your premises and satisfy yourself that it is suitable

Risk

Controls



Workers risk problems (back pain) if they try to lift or move objects that are heavy or awkward to carry such as equipment parts, cleaning machines or heavy waste bags or if they are required to work in awkward postures.

- Train all staff in safe lifting and use of cleaning equipment and follow safe systems of work
- Provide handling aids such as wheeled equipment to reduce lifting and carrying
- Store cleaning equipment near their point of use
- Provide long-handled tools to avoid need to stretch and stoop
- Empty waste material bags regularly to avoid heavy lifting



Workers risk being drawn in, entrapment, entanglement, amputations or death when cleaning automatic / dangerous parts of machinery.

- Isolate machines from all sources of energy e.g. electrical, pneumatic, mechanical etc and release any stored energy before cleaning commences
- Remember: Lock – tag – try
- Only allow authorised and trained staff do this work
- Devise a safe system of work
- Train staff and sub-contractors in cleaning, assembly and test procedures
- Wear appropriate clothing and personal protective equipment



Lone workers can be particularly vulnerable to workplace violence, during emergency situations, operating machinery, when attempting to carry out work which requires more than one person e.g. manual handling.

- Ensure lone workers are sufficiently experienced and fully understand the risks of their job and the relevant precautions
- Set limits on what they can and cannot do on their own
- Put measures in place to monitor staff e.g. periodic supervisor visits, regular contact via mobile phone, email, radios etc
- Provide automatic warning systems to ensure staff have completed their task/arrived home
- Establish emergency procedures and train staff what to do in an emergency



Poorly maintained electrical equipment can lead to potentially fatal electric shock / burns / fire which can affect the whole premises.

- Implement an appropriately planned maintenance system
- Train and instruct users in the correct use of electrically powered cleaning equipment and how to carry out some simple pre use visual checks
- Instruct users to STOP using equipment if an defect is found and report the matter to the management
- Provide RCD protection

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What does the research say?

There has been research carried out to look at the musculoskeletal health of cleaners. This research found that:










- 74% of cleaners had experienced muscular aches, pains and discomfort during the previous 12 months.
- 53% of cleaners had sought medical advice for these aches and pains.
- 23% of cleaners had been absent from work as a result of aches and pains within the previous 12 months.



A kitchen worker fractured her skull after slipping on a tiled floor of the catering premises where she worked. She was rushed to hospital where she drifted in and out of consciousness, suffered seizures and spent a lengthy period in the hospital's high dependency unit. Floor 'safety' mats had been put down in some parts of the kitchen but cleaners had removed these mats at the time of the workers accident. The company was ordered to pay over £36,000 including prosecution costs.

This leaflet gives simple, practical advice on what you can do to eliminate or reduce the risks from cleaning activities, although for some operations you will need more detailed information.

Checklist for Action

Decide what needs to be cleaned and by whom	
Check whether there will be any particular hazards associated with the tasks such as exposure to chemicals or other agents, risks from dangerous machinery, work at height, electric shock	
Define how to make the area and/or equipment safe for cleaning operations	
Identify the right equipment needed and make sure there are sufficient competent staff and adequate time to carry out cleaning activities	
Put in place procedures for emergency situations	
Train your staff and provide all the necessary information to contractors/specialist staff to keep them safe. This is especially important as contracted staff may not be familiar with your workplace	
Provide appropriate personal protective equipment	
Monitor activities to ensure safety rules are observed	
Once work is completed, check that the area and equipment have been left in a safe condition	



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Basic Rules

- Planning
- Making the work area safe
- Using the appropriate equipment
- Working as planned
- Final Check

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Maintenance Tasks

- Corrective
- Preventive

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Key Hazards

- Asbestos
- Work at Height
- Isolation

Want to Know More? Additional information is available from the HSENI website www.hseni.gov.uk or via the helpline number 0800 0320 121