

WORKPLACE HEALTH *and* SAFETY BASICS *for* CLEANERS

Responsibilities, problems and solutions



INTRODUCTION

Workplace health and safety can be a challenge, particularly if you are a cleaner. Why? Because you may often work alone and, if you're a contractor, you may work at:

- a number of different workplaces; or
- workplaces owned by people other than your boss.

Because every workplace is different, you and your employer may be faced with very different health and safety risks.

This guide will remind you and your employer of your responsibilities for health and safety at work.

It will also provide you with information about some of the more common hazards faced by cleaners.



Please note

This information is for guidance only and is not to be taken as an expression of the law. It should be read in conjunction with the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995*, the *Workplace Health and Safety Regulations 1998* and any other relevant legislation. Copies of the legislation can be purchased from Print Applied Technology: call (03) 6233 3289 or freecall 1800 030 940. It is also available on the Internet at www.thelaw.tas.gov.au

This guide was produced by staff from WorkCover Tasmania and Workplace Standards Tasmania.

We welcome your feedback on this guide.

Send to: wstinfo@justice.tas.gov.au

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK?

Employers

Employers have the *main responsibility* for health and safety in the workplace. As far as is reasonably practical, employers must make sure that the workplace is safe and does not damage the health of workers. This means:

- checking the workplace regularly for anything that may harm workers and fixing any problems as soon as possible;
- providing workers with the information, instruction and training they need to do their job;
- talking to workers themselves or to their health and safety representatives about health and safety issues.

With contract cleaning, the employer may not be the owner or the person responsible for the workplace. So there may well be hazards in the workplace over which the employer (contractor) has no control. It is very important therefore for the person who is in control of the workplace to be made aware of any hazards that may affect the health and safety of workers. In addition they must inform contractors and workers of known hazards. Workers also need to know specific site safety rules and what to do in an emergency.



Workers

As a worker, you have a responsibility to take reasonable care of your own health and safety as well as the safety of others. You must also:

- follow any safety directions given by your employer or building owner
- work with your employer and anyone who can make your workplace safer
- never deliberately misuse or interfere with equipment
- report any injury or near miss immediately.

If you fail to meet these requirements, you may be disciplined by your employer or even prosecuted under the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995*.

If you become aware of a hazard in the workplace, alert your supervisor/employer. Your employer will decide who needs to check out the problem. It may be that the problem is outside the control of your employer and they may have to alert the person in control of the workplace to fix the problem.

COMMON SAFETY PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Even though your employer has the main responsibility for managing workplace hazards, you should also be aware of the types of safety problems you may face in your work. The following situations highlight some common hazards faced by cleaners, what could happen as a result, and a number of possible solutions.

Safety Hazard

Damaged electrical cords on vacuum cleaners, floor polishers and other equipment



Possible Result

Electric shocks, burns; possibly death

Possible Solutions

Get a licensed electrical contractor to fix damaged or faulty cords

Inspect and maintain equipment regularly

Safety Hazard

Walking on slippery floors after mopping



Possible Result

Slips, trips and falls

Possible Solutions

Use auto-scrubbers

Use barricades to separate people from wet areas

Use portable signs to warn people

Safety Hazard

Footwear with slippery soles



Possible Result

Slips, trips and falls

Possible Solution

Wear non-slip footwear

Safety Hazard

Lifting heavy cartons or equipment



Possible Result

Permanent disabling injury as a result of damage to the back, muscles and ligaments

Possible Solutions

- Use a machine to do lifting where possible
- Use a trolley to move heavy items
- Buy products in smaller packages
- Get help from workmates to lift heavy items

Safety Hazard

Carrying out work in awkward positions



Possible Result

Muscle and ligament strains

Possible Solution

Get training in safe work practices and lifting techniques

Adopt a safety culture that uses these practices and techniques

Safety Hazard

Carrying equipment on stairs



Possible Result

Slips, trips and falls

Possible Solutions

Provide and use ramps and double doors for easy access

Provide a set of essential equipment on each floor of multistorey buildings

Make several trips with smaller loads

Safety Hazard

Sharp objects, particularly sharps hidden in bins



Possible Result

Cuts and serious infections such as Hepatitis B, C and HIV

Possible Solutions

Use garbage bags made of tough canvas instead of plastic
Carry all plastic garbage bags in trolleys, not by hand
Get training in the safe handling of sharps

Safety Hazard

Use of chemicals and hazardous substances

Possible Results

Skin irritation, chemical poisoning and/or burns, occupational asthma and diseases such as cancer

Possible Solutions

Ensure all chemicals and hazardous substances are correctly labelled

Provide a material safety data sheet (MSDS) for every chemical and hazardous substance

Ensure appropriate training is provided in the safe handling, use and disposal of chemicals and hazardous substances

Use appropriate personal protective equipment at all times

Safety Hazard

Noise



Possible Results

Noise-induced hearing loss, balance problems

Possible Solutions

Carry out a noise assessment and have audiometric testing if required

Wear hearing protection

Job rotation may also help

1300 366 322
www.worksafe.tas.gov.au

For more information contact
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