TOOLBOX TALK · HEALTH & SAFETY

Housekeeping: *The Cheapest Control There Is*

Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992: clear routes, safe storage, spill response and why tidiness is a legal duty, not a preference.

Last reviewed: August 2026 HSE · Workplace Regs 1992 England, Scotland and Wales ukworkrights.co.uk

In Northern Ireland, similar duties come from Northern Ireland's own health and safety law. Contact HSENI (Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland), not the HSE.

THE RISK

Why housekeeping is a safety issue

- **Slips and trips are the most common cause of workplace injury in Great Britain**, and poor housekeeping is the leading contributor
- Blocked routes turn a manageable incident into a **fatal one during an evacuation**
- Materials stored badly cause **falling object injuries** and manual handling problems
- Accumulated waste and dust create a **fire load and, in some settings, an explosion risk**
- Trailing leads and hoses are the single most reported trip hazard in UK workplaces
- Poor housekeeping is **the clearest visible signal of how a site is run**, inspectors and clients read it immediately

IT IS A LEGAL DUTY, NOT TIDINESS

Regulation 12 requires floors and traffic routes to be kept free from obstructions and from anything that may cause a person to slip, trip or fall. Housekeeping is enforceable, not optional.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The standards to hold

- **Walkways and stairs clear** at all times, not cleared at the end of the day
- **Fire exits, extinguishers, alarm points and electrical panels never obstructed**
- Spills dealt with **immediately**, with a clear rule on who cleans what
- Materials stored at **safe heights, stable, and not overhanging** racking or edges
- Waste removed regularly rather than accumulating in corners
- **Cables and hoses routed, covered or removed**, never left across a walkway
- Adequate **lighting** on stairs, walkways and storage areas
- Clean as you go, so the job never ends with a big clear-up nobody has time for

CLEAN AS YOU GO

Sites that tidy continuously stay safe. Sites that tidy at the end of the week are unsafe for four days out of five, and the tidy-up gets skipped whenever the job runs late.

YOUR RIGHTS

What you can expect and report

- A workplace that is **kept clean and in good order**. This is the employer's duty, not a favour
- **Suitable and sufficient welfare facilities**, including somewhere to eat away from contamination
- Enough **waste containers, storage and time** to keep the area clear
- To **report hazards without detriment** (Employment Rights Act 1996 s.44)
- If an employer ignores repeated reports, **HSE can be contacted on 0300 003 1647** or your local authority for offices and shops
- Injuries from slips and trips should be recorded in the accident book, and some are **reportable under RIDDOR**

REPORT IT IN WRITING

A verbal mention is easy to forget. A short email or entry in the site diary creates a record, and if something later goes wrong, that record matters a great deal.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Frequently asked questions

Q Is housekeeping a legal requirement?

Yes. The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 require workplaces to be kept clean, and floors and traffic routes to be free from obstruction and from anything likely to cause a slip, trip or fall. It is enforceable in the same way as any other safety duty.

Q Whose job is it to clear up?

Ultimately the employer must ensure the workplace is kept in good order, including by providing enough time, storage and waste facilities. In practice everyone contributes, but 'nobody had time' is not a defence for the employer.

Q What if my employer won't provide waste facilities?

Raise it in writing, since the duty to provide a clean and orderly workplace sits with them. If nothing changes, HSE covers most industrial sites on 0300 003 1647, while local authority environmental health covers offices, shops and warehouses.

FOR WHOEVER RUNS THIS TALK

Delivery notes & attendance record

Before you start

This is the talk to deliver by walking the area rather than standing still. Point at actual hazards. Finish by agreeing two or three things that will be cleared before the end of the shift, and write them on the record.

Questions to ask the team

1. Walking in, what was the first thing you had to step over or around?
2. Is anything currently blocking a fire exit, an extinguisher or an electrical panel?
3. Where does waste go here, and is that working?
4. What is the one thing we could clear today that would make the biggest difference?

The law behind this talk

Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 (regs. 9, 12 and 13: cleanliness, floors and traffic routes, falling objects); Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 s.2

Employers must give workers comprehensible information, instruction and training on the risks they face, Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 s.2(2)(c) and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 reg. 10. Keep the record below as evidence that you did.

Attendance record

Topic	Housekeeping: The Cheapest Safety Control There Is
Date	
Site / location	
Delivered by	
Actions agreed	
Next talk due	

Attendees

Name	Signature

Use the Print handout button to print this record. General information only, not legal advice. This toolbox talk is generic material and is not a substitute for a suitable and sufficient risk assessment by a competent person. Employers remain responsible for their duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

FREE H&S GUIDES

Housekeeping *free guide*

Get plain-English information on your rights and your employer's legal duties.

HSE: REPORT AN ISSUE
0300 003 1647
hse.gov.uk

ACAS
0300 123 1100
acas.org.uk

CITIZENS ADVICE (ENGLAND)
0800 144 8848
citizensadvice.org.uk

CITIZENS ADVICE (WALES)
0800 702 2020
citizensadvice.org.uk

CITIZENS ADVICE SCOTLAND
0800 028 1456
cas.org.uk

UK WORK RIGHTS
Housekeeping
ukworkrights.co.uk/toolbox-housekeeping.html

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OTHER WAYS TO GET HELP

Ways to contact Acas

- Helpline: 0300 123 1100, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.
- Another language: call the helpline and ask for an interpreter. Acas says it can provide one straight away.
- Welsh: Acas can provide its services in Welsh if you ask.
- Cannot hear or speak on the phone: Relay UK, 18001 0300 123 1100, on the Relay UK app or a textphone. You type what you want to say and get text replies from the adviser.
- British Sign Language (BSL): call the helpline through the InterpretersLive! video relay service, in your browser or on the InterpretersLive! app. The interpreter calls Acas and translates between you and the adviser.
- If you cannot call the helpline (for example, you find it hard to speak on the phone, you are not in the UK, or you don't have enough phone credit), use the Acas accessibility form to ask for advice another way. Acas usually replies by email within 10 working days, by BSL or lip reading video call within 2 working days, or by phone within 5 working days. Acas reviews these requests Tuesday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.
- Early conciliation: if your case is already in conciliation, contact your conciliator. Their details are in your "Introducing Your Conciliator" email.
- Training, mediation support, collective conciliation or arbitration (not advice): Acas Training and Customer Services, 0300 123 1150, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, or email events@acas.org.uk. Relay UK: 18001 0300 123 1150. You can ask for an interpreter or call through InterpretersLive!. To book a BSL interpreter in advance for any Acas service, email events@acas.org.uk or call 0300 123 1150.

OTHER WAYS TO GET HELP

Ways to contact Citizens Advice in England

- Adviceline: 0800 144 8848. Usually open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, not on public holidays. Free from mobiles and landlines. At busy times you might wait up to an hour. If you call from a mobile you'll be asked for your postcode.
- Cannot hear or speak on the phone: Relay UK. Dial 18001 then 0800 144 8848, using the app or a textphone. There's no extra charge.
- Money or debt: debt helpline 0800 240 4420, Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm, Saturday 9.30am to 1pm, not on public holidays. Relay UK: 18001 then 0800 240 4420.
- Online chat with an adviser: debt problems (Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm, Saturday 9.30am to 1pm); claiming Universal Credit (Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm); energy bills or supply, consumer problems, or any other problem (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm).
- Your local Citizens Advice: search by postcode or town on the Citizens Advice website. Most can only help if you live or work in their area.

OTHER WAYS TO GET HELP

Ways to contact Citizens Advice in Wales

- Advicelink: 0800 702 2020. Monday to Friday 8am to 7pm, Saturday 9am to 1pm, not on public holidays. Free from mobiles and landlines. At busy times you might wait up to an hour.
- Cannot hear or speak on the phone: Relay UK. Dial 18001 then 0800 702 2020, using the app or a textphone. There's no extra charge.
- Online chat with an adviser: usually Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.
- Your local Citizens Advice: search by postcode or town on the Citizens Advice website.

OTHER WAYS TO GET HELP

Ways to contact Citizens Advice in Scotland

- Free phone line to your local bureau: 0800 028 1456. Say the first part of your postcode and you'll be put through.
- British Sign Language (BSL): make a free BSL call to an adviser through the Contact Scotland BSL website or app (video relay interpreting on a computer, tablet or mobile). Contact Scotland BSL is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Language or access needs: tell the bureau and they'll do their best to meet them.
- Applying for Universal Credit for the first time: Help to Claim helpline 0800 023 2581, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm, or webchat on the Citizens Advice Scotland website. There's also a BSL service for Universal Credit applications.
- Defined contribution pensions (aged 50 or over): Pension Wise, 0800 138 3944, or +44 20 3733 3495 from outside the UK.
- NHS complaints in Scotland: Patient Advice and Support Service (PASS), 0800 917 2127, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.
- Gambling Support Service advice line: 0800 328 1131, Monday to Friday, 10am to 3pm.
- Your local bureau: find its contact details and opening times by postcode on the Citizens Advice Scotland website.
- If you cannot hear or speak on the phone, you can use Relay UK to make the call by typing. Use the free Relay UK app, or a textphone: dial 18001 first, then the number.

OTHER WAYS TO GET HELP

Ways to contact HSE

- Tell HSE about a health and safety issue: use the online form, or call 0300 003 1647 and HSE will fill it in for you. Building safety (Building Safety Regulator): 0300 790 6787.
- Ask HSE about health and safety, or reach a named person at HSE: use the online form, or call 0300 003 1747.
- Both lines: Monday and Tuesday 8.30am to 5pm, Wednesday 10am to 5pm, Thursday and Friday 8.30am to 5pm.
- Fatal and major injuries only: Incident Contact Centre, 0345 300 9923, Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm. Report everything else online.
- Out of hours, only after a work-related death, a serious incident with several casualties, or one causing major disruption: duty officer, 0151 922 9235.
- Cannot hear or speak on the phone: HSE says it provides a text relay service for people who are D/deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment.
- If you cannot hear or speak on the phone, you can use Relay UK to make the call by typing. Use the free Relay UK app, or a textphone: dial 18001 first, then the number.
- Website information in another format (accessible PDF, large print, easy read, audio or braille): use HSE's online contact form. HSE replies within 21 days.
- Other languages: HSE publishes translated information in many languages (hse.gov.uk/languages).

KEEP GOING

More free *toolbox talks*

TOOLBOX TALK

Slips, Trips & Falls

ukworkrights.co.uk/toolbox-slipstrips.html

TOOLBOX TALK

5S Workplace Organisation

ukworkrights.co.uk/toolbox-5s.html

TOOLBOX TALK

Fire Safety

ukworkrights.co.uk/toolbox-firesafety.html

FREE GUIDE

Health and safety at work

ukworkrights.co.uk/guide-health-safety.html