

# *TerranearPMC Safety Share*

## **Week of June 18, 2012 – The High Price of Poor Housekeeping**

OK, let's start with a few questions.

1. How often is your project work area(s) cleaned?
2. Does your project perform regular inspections to note cluttered work areas and walkways?
3. Are boxes stacked to heights that are potentially unstable?
4. Have you noticed over-stuffing in a storage area beyond its point to be safe?
5. How are materials disposed?
6. Does your project team understand how to dispose of materials correctly?
7. Do project team members know what to do if storage containers are full?
8. Do you have specific areas to store tools?

No, no...there's not going to be a requirement to send in your answers and get graded! Yet it is important that we understand the gist of these questions. They all relate to how we understand housekeeping issues as well as what our attitude is towards housekeeping. There exists an underlying attitude that because housekeeping does not fall within a technical or scientific discipline, it does not carry the same level of attention or priority as other things that are considered scientific and/or technical. When this happens, we leave ourselves open to a very real workplace hazard.

The fact is, poor housekeeping has been directly linked to many types of occupational injuries; most notably are slips, trips and falls. Whether someone slips on an icy/slippery surface (because no one bothered to take the initiative to report it and go the extra distance to ensure that areas were dried or that salt/gravel was placed on walkways to increase traction) or trips over a box or other item that was not properly stored, chances are such conditions were noted before the occurrence. As such, there was an opportunity to be proactive and to correct a hazardous condition and therefore, prevent someone from getting hurt. Yet, studies show that there is a certain amount of reluctance for people to take the initiative and correct such conditions when they are identified.

Poor housekeeping can be a cause of such accidents as:

- Tripping over loose objects on floors, stairs and platforms
- Being hit by a falling box (improperly stored) or other object
- Slipping on greasy, wet or dirty surfaces
- Being struck by protruding object that have been poorly stacked
- Getting cuts or having skin punctured or torn (especially hands) on projecting nails, wire or steel strapping

Slips, trips and falls make up the majority of general industry accidents. According to the U.S. Department of Labour's Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA), slips, trips and falls account for 15 percent of all accidental deaths, and are second only to motor vehicles as a cause of fatalities. According to the National Safety Council, last year there were 822 occupational deaths due to falls.

Slips and falls are actually two very different things. “When you slip, you slip on a floor, and lose your balance. A fall is when you move from one level to another.

According to the 2006 Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index, the annual direct cost of disabling occupational injuries due to slips, trips and falls is estimated to exceed \$11 billion. The Index reports that falls on the same level are the second most costly occupational injury (estimated annual cost of \$6.7 billion), just behind overexertion. It also shows that bodily reaction, which comprises injuries from slipping or tripping, is the third highest injury category, followed by falls to a lower level (4.6 billion). “The average cost from slip and falls is \$22,800 per accident,”

Wet or damp floors are not the only cause of slip, trip and fall accidents within a facility. Clutter, footwear and improper cleaning can also cause hazards for both employees and building occupants alike. In fact, according to reports, **50 percent of facility** accidents can actually be attributed to the type of flooring used. Regardless of cause, these accidents can cost facilities big bucks in unemployment and liability claims.

Housekeeping is not just about cleanliness. It includes keeping work areas neat and orderly and keeping aisles, floors and stairs free from slip and trip hazards. The removal of waste (paper, cardboard, containers, used chemicals, etc.) from the work area is valuable in reducing accidents. Housekeeping requires focusing attention on important details in the workplace such as layout, aisle markings, adequacy of storage facilities and maintenance. Maintaining “order” throughout the day requires a great deal of planning and management.

Experience has shown that good housekeeping is an essential and effective part of a safety and health program. Effective housekeeping helps eliminate workplace hazards and promotes a safer, more efficient work environment. Poor housekeeping can contribute to accidents by hiding hazards that cause injuries. Effective housekeeping at work benefits both employer and employees and helps us in the following areas.

- Fewer accidents by creating an orderly, clutter-free, spill-free work environment
- Decreased fire hazards
- Reduced exposure to hazardous substances
- Improved control of tools and materials
- Better hygienic conditions leading to improved health
- More effective use of space

It is important that we remember that accidents, whether due to a serious fall or someone slipping on the floor, are preventable. In the case of an injury caused by poor housekeeping, it is indeed tragic as such situations are 100% preventable. It is just a matter of us: as a group and as individuals, to correct these hazards when we identify them. If we cannot correct the situation ourselves, then we can, at least, communicate them to our project manager, field team lead AND to our fellow employs so they are aware. After all, once a hazard has been identified, we are half way to preventing an accident – it’s up to us to do the rest.

**Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere**

Albert Einstein