

Example risk assessment for general office cleaning

Setting the scene

Smith's Cleaners provide commercial cleaning services to businesses, and employ 20 part-time cleaners. They recently won a contract to clean two floors of an office complex in a city centre, Monday to Friday. Three cleaners, working every day from 5.00 pm to 7.00 pm, machine clean hard floors in the reception, kitchen and toilet areas and generally clean the offices. If a regular cleaner is sick or on holiday, a temporary worker from an agency is used. The offices have 24-hour security cover.

The contracts manager did the risk assessment.

How was the risk assessment done?

The manager followed the guidance in *Five steps to risk assessment* (www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf).

- 1 To identify the hazards, the manager:
 - looked at HSE's website for free health and safety advice and guidance for the cleaning industry (www.hse.gov.uk/cleaning/) and at guidance for employing agency workers (www.businesslink.gov.uk/);
 - walked the areas where cleaning staff will be working, noting things that may pose potential risks and taking HSE guidance into account;
 - talked to workplace health and safety

- representatives and cleaning staff about the risks, taking into account the needs of any particular staff members, such as whether they are pregnant or aged under 18;
- talked to the client company and agreed issues such as:
 - lines and frequency of communication between the cleaning company and the client company;
 - the client company's own standard of housekeeping, eg clear walkways, spills cleared up immediately etc;
 - facilities and equipment available to the cleaners, including the amount of storage space available, location of sinks and taps etc;
 - the system for reporting near-miss accidents and risks discovered by cleaners, eg damaged floor tiles, that can cause accidents in the client company;
 - the security of cleaning equipment and substances, to ensure only trained cleaners can access and use them; and
 - making sure that all cleaners know what they must do if there is a fire.
 - 2 The manager wrote down who would be harmed by the hazards and how.
 - 3 For each hazard, the manager wrote down what controls, if any, were in place to manage these hazards. The manager then compared these controls to the good practice guidance set out on HSE's website. Where existing controls were not considered good

enough, the manager wrote down what else needed to be done to control or eliminate the risk.

- 4 The manager discussed the findings with the staff cleaning those offices, making sure they understood the risks of the job and how these risks would be controlled and monitored. One cleaner, whose first language was not English, had difficulty understanding this, so the manager arranged for a bi-lingual cleaner from another team to translate. The manager pinned a copy of the risk assessment in the cleaning cupboard for all staff to see. When putting the risk assessment into practice, the manager decided to prioritise and tackle the most important things first. This included identifying when the actions should be done and who would do them. As each action was completed, they were ticked off the plan.
- 5 The manager decided to review and update the risk assessment every year, or straightaway if major changes happened in the workplace – including changes in the use of equipment or chemicals.

Company name: Smith's Cleaners Date of risk assessment: 1/8/07

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	What are you already doing?	What further action is necessary?	Action by who?	Action by when?	Done
Slips, trips and falls	Staff and others risk injuries such as fractures and bruising if they trip over objects, or slip on spillages or on wet floors, and fall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Good housekeeping at client company. ■ Warning cones placed in wet floor areas. ■ Client company instructs all staff to keep off wet floors. ■ Cleaners use electrical socket nearest to where they are working to reduce risk of tripping over leads. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To further reduce risk of slips, introduce two-mop system for cleaning hard floors (wet mopping followed by dry mopping). 	Manager	31/8/07	System introduced 8/8/07 Instructed 2/8/07 Began 2/8/07
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cleaners instructed to wear sensible shoes, eg flat shoes with a good grip. 	Manager	31/8/07	
Contact with bleach and other cleaning chemicals	Staff risk getting skin problems such as dermatitis, and eye damage, from direct contact with bleach and other cleaning chemicals, eg solvents and detergents. Chemical vapour may cause breathing problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Staff asked when they start if they suffer ill health, eg skin problems, when using cleaning chemicals. ■ Long-handled mops and brushes, and strong rubber gloves, are provided and staff trained in their use. ■ All staff trained in the risks, use and storage of cleaning chemicals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Investigate replacing chemicals marked 'irritant' with milder alternatives. 	Manager	7/8/07	Staff reminded
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Staff reminded to report any health problems they think may come from cleaning, and to check for dry, red or itchy skin on their hands. 	All staff	7/8/07	2/8/07
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Staff reminded to wash gloves after use. 	Manager	31/8/07	2/8/07
Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and injuries	Staff risk injuries such as back problems if they try to lift objects that are heavy and/or awkward to carry, such as cleaning machines or full mopping buckets, or if they are required to often work in awkward postures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cleaning equipment provided for each floor. ■ Long-handled mops, brushes and dusters are provided to reduce need to stretch and stoop. ■ Staff do not overfill buckets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide new mopping system – long-handled wringer, to reduce force needed to squeeze mop, and a bucket on wheels to reduce lifting and carrying (see 'slips, trips and falls'). 	Manager	31/8/08	System delivered 8/8/08

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	What are you already doing?	What further action is necessary?	Action by who?	Action by when?	Done
Work at height	Staff risk bruising and fracture injuries if they fall from any height.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ No need for staff work from stepladders etc and they are instructed not to do so. ■ 'No standing on chairs' policy. ■ Staff trained in safe system of work for cleaning stairs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None 			
Machine cleaning of floors	Staff and others risk injury from improper use of the machine, eg if the machine were to buck and hit feet or ankles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Machine provided is the right machine for the job. ■ Cleaners trained in the safe use of the machine. ■ Machine regularly examined by a competent person and maintained as necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cleaners reminded not to use the machine if they have doubts about its safety. 	Manager	7/8/07	2/8/07
Lone working	Staff may suffer sudden illness/accident while working alone and be unable to summon help.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cleaning staff sign in/out at the front desk. If they have not signed out by 7.15 pm, security staff look for them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None 			
Electrical	Staff risk electric shocks or burns from faulty electrical equipment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Staff check for damaged plugs, cables and on/off switches before using the cleaning machines. ■ If defect is noted, the machine is taken out of use. ■ Staff trained not to splash water near sockets or electrical appliances. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Manager to regularly check plugs, cables and switches of cleaning machines. 	Manager	First check on 2/8/07	2/8/07

Assessment review date: 1/8/08