

Keep a Clean Machine Shop



A poorly maintained work environment in a machine shop conceals all kinds of serious hazards. This may result in safety incidents ranging from trips and falls to chemical exposures, electrical hazards, and even explosions.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

There are many housekeeping hazards in machine shops. Some of these hazards are environmental, such as accumulated grinding dust which can cause dust explosions, shavings from a drill press which may cause cuts or punctures, or poor lighting and trip hazards.

Others housekeeping hazards are chemical, for instance, rags used for solvents that are not properly disposed of may spontaneously combust. The risk of a dust explosion increases in winter when low humidity levels make dust easy to disperse and ignite.

What Can Happen?

Two workers were sorting materials on an output conveyor at the electronics recycling factory where they worked. Nearby, a ring mill pulverizing machine generated a great deal of dust. No established dust collection or fire suppression system existed, so the dust collected to unsafe levels.

But nobody informed a supervisor. It was winter and the warehouse was closed up and poorly ventilated. The dust exploded and the ring mill caught fire, causing serious burn injuries to both workers. The workers spent time in the hospital, and it was months before either of them could return to work.

What Should You Do?

To ensure your workplace is kept in top shape, and to prevent hazards, practice proper housekeeping:

1. Don't leave remnants of packing material on the floor.
2. Don't stack items so high that they block the fire sprinkler heads.
3. Don't pile materials too close to sources of heat or electricity.
4. Don't place items so that they stick out into walkways.
5. Ensure your workshop is properly ventilated. Notify your supervisor if you have concerns about ventilation.
6. Dust from grinding and other debris should be removed daily. If an accumulation of dust occurs in an unreachable area, notify your supervisor.
7. Dispose of oily or solvent-covered rags in a fireproof, metal container.

8. Promptly clean up any spills that might create slipping hazards.

FINAL WORD

In the course of everyday duties and time constraints, it is easy to brush off the importance of housekeeping in a machine shop. But overlooking basic housekeeping tasks can bring serious consequences. To stay safe, practice routine housekeeping tasks every day, and notify your supervisor if something appears out of order or dangerous.