

**Chapter**  
**13**

**Occupational Health, Safety  
& Injury Management**

## INTRODUCTION

Employers in the cleaning industry, as in any industry, have a duty of care under the Occupational Safety and Health Act 2004, to ensure that employees are not exposed to hazards at the workplace. This responsibility is outlined in greater detail in the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations, which requires employers to identify hazards in the workplace and assess and control the risk of harm or injury.

Other publications by WorkSafe in the form of Codes of Practice and Guidance Notes contain practical advice and explanatory information to assist in the identification, assessment and control of some of the more common workplace risks.

As well as WorkSafe publications, the Australian Standard 4801:2000 - Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems, provides guidance for the development and implementation of an effective OHS management system applicable to any organisation, regardless of size or industry.

This publication has been developed by the **HandL Consultancy** to target risks specifically encountered in the cleaning industry and to assist employers to develop strategies or control measures to eliminate or reduce those risks. The guidelines complement **HandL's** OHS & IM Manual to provide all round practical assistance to employers in the cleaning industry for the management of occupational safety and health in the workplace.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

GENERAL DUTIES OF EMPLOYERS  
DUTIES OF EMPLOYEES AND SUB-CONTRACTORS  
CONSULTATION  
TRAINING  
MANUAL HANDLING  
SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS  
CHEMICAL HANDLING  
ELECTRICITY  
SHARPS  
WORKING ALONE  
WORKING AT HEIGHTS  
BACKPACK VACUUM CLEANERS  
DUST  
NOISE  
FIRST-AID

## GENERAL DUTIES OF EMPLOYERS

Employers have a general duty, according to the Act, to:

- Provide a workplace and safe systems of work so that, as far as practicable, employees are not exposed to hazards
- Provide employees with information, instruction, training and supervision to allow them to work in a safe manner
- Consult and cooperate with employees in matters related to safety and health at work
- Provide adequate protective clothing and equipment where hazards cannot be completely eliminated
- Ensure plant and equipment is adequately maintained so it can be used safely, and
- Ensure the health and safety of any person, not necessarily an employee, who may be affected by the employer's or employee's work.

An employer may also have other responsibilities:

If the workplace or certain areas of the workplace are under the employer's control, the employer is responsible to ensure that the workplace, all entrances and exits are safe so that people, where authorised, may enter, leave and use the workplace without exposure to hazards.

Legislation requires four basic steps to ensure that employees are not exposed to hazards at the workplace. They are:

- Identification of hazards
- Assessment of the risk of injury or harm if a person is exposed to the hazard
- Implementing controls to eliminate or reduce the risk, and
- Training staff in the use of such controls to ensure they understand how to reduce or eliminate the risk.

Recommended options for minimising the risk of injury when a hazard has been identified include the following in preferred order:

- Elimination of the hazard or hazardous work practice from the workplace altogether
- Substitution of the hazard with a less hazardous one
- Isolation or separation of the hazard from the people involved eg installing barriers or screens or marking off hazardous area
- Engineering control of the hazard by such means as modification of tools or equipment
- Administrative control of the hazard by means which include change to work practices and additional training etc.
- Personal Protective Equipment which could be supplied to increase protection from the hazard.

Introducing control options may not necessarily eliminate or minimise the risk of injury or harm. All control measures must be reviewed at least annually and continually monitored to ensure they are actually reducing the risk.

Where an employer engages a subcontractor in a workplace the employer has the same duty of care to the subcontractor and the subcontractor's employees as he or she does to one's own employees. While an employer's duty with regard to subcontractors is limited to areas under their control, it is suggested that the employer or principal contractor:

- Clarifies the areas of control for each person or organisation
- Provides subcontractors with details of safety and health policies and plans and practices which apply to them and
- Ensure that the same health and safety policies that apply to employees are also applied to subcontractors.

## CONSULTATION AND CO-OPERATION

Consultation plays an extremely important role in providing and maintaining a safe and healthy workplace, as employees are most likely to know about the risks associated with their work. Safety and health representatives have an important role in this consultation.

Employer and employee co-operation in identifying and eliminating or controlling hazards will help ensure that employees have a commitment to the safe work practices which are subsequently developed.

Effective planning is required to ensure that mechanisms are available for workers to have the opportunity to contribute towards the development of safe work practices.

Wherever possible, this should involve employers and employees actively working together with the common aim of improving standards of safety and health in each workplace. The establishment of safety and health committees is encouraged as an effective means of providing a means for consultation and co-operation.

In workplaces where there is no safety and health representative or safety and health committee, the employer still has a duty to consult and co-operate with employees.

Complementing the employers' duty of care is the employees' duty under the Act. An employee is a person who works under a contract of employment, apprenticeship or industrial training agreement.

Given that the employer has fulfilled his or her duty of care by providing appropriate information, instruction, training and supervision, the employee has a duty to take reasonable care for their own safety and health and to avoid harming the safety and health of other people.

Under the Act, employees must:

- Follow the employer's instructions with regard to safety and health procedures
- Use personal protective clothing and equipment provided
- Take good care of equipment provided in the interests of safety and health
- Report hazards to the employer using the correct reporting procedure
- Report injury or harm to health that is connected with any work activity using the correct reporting procedure
- Co-operate fully with employers so that they are able to carry out their duties under the Act.

Sub-contractors with their own employees have the same obligation under the Act as employers (see this publication -General duties of employers). Under the Act, a self-employed person means a person who works for gain or rewards other than as an employee, regardless of whether he or she employs any other person. All sub-contractors, as self-employed persons, therefore have an obligation under the Act to take reasonable care to:

- Protect their own safety and health at work and
- Avoid harming the safety and health of other people.

As for employers, the duty of care of self-employed persons extends to any person who may be affected by work activities (eg the general public) and is not confined to employees.

## TRAINING

The Occupational Health Safety Act 2004 requires employers to provide employees with the necessary information, instruction, training and supervision to carry out their duties safely.

Training employees in safe cleaning methods is an effective way to reduce accidents and control hazards in the workplace. It is also important to regularly monitor and supervise staff to reinforce training and encourage safe work practices.

It is important that training in the cleaning industry is relevant to the duties being performed and is provided by competent persons who have themselves been trained in safe practices and instruction techniques.

It is recommended that training be provided in a combination of the following forms so that the desired level of competency is achieved:

- Induction and/or in-house training
- On-the-job training
- Accredited or recognized industry training.

Training programs should include, but not be limited to, instruction in:

- Specific cleaning tasks
- Safe operation and maintenance of equipment
- Safe manual handling and chemical handling practices
- The use and maintenance of personal protective equipment
- Emergency procedures
- Hazard and accident reporting requirements.

Training should be provided:

- When a new employee begins
- Regularly, as refresher training
- When new cleaning methods, equipment, policies or procedures are introduced
- When an employee is required to perform new or different cleaning duties
- When new laws which affect the employee(s) come into effect.

Some employees may require specialised supervision and training. These employees include, but are not limited to:

- Young employees
- Pregnant women
- Employees recently returned to work after ill health or injury
- Employees with limited English speaking/reading ability.

Training for employees with limited English speaking/reading ability should be delivered in a way which ensures that all information, instruction and training is understood. As well as using interpreters and providing translated information, methods may include:

- Videos
- Demonstrations
- Pictures or graphics
- Using short, simple English phrases.

## MANUAL HANDLING

Manual handling is described in the Regulations as “any activity requiring the use of force exerted by a person to lift, lower, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain a person, animal or thing”.

Manual handling incidents in the cleaning industry usually result in slips and trips or sprains and strains of varying degrees often causing serious injuries requiring long periods off work. In the worst cases, a person who has a manual handling injury may never return to work.

Manual handling tasks in the cleaning industry which may lead to injuries include:

- Repetitive pushing and pulling of mops, brooms, vacuum cleaners, floor polishers, carpet-cleaning machines
- Lifting and carrying heavy, bulky, large or awkward cleaning equipment such as mop buckets, vacuum cleaners, floor polishers and carpet-cleaning machines
- Excessive bending of the back while vacuuming, carpet cleaning or mopping
- Bending and stretching to clean high, low or out-of-the-way fixtures and fittings
- Holding and restraining cleaning equipment such as floor polishers, automatic scrubbing machines, litter vacs, carpet-cleaning machines
- Twisting while performing cleaning tasks or when manoeuvring/controlling floor polishers etc
- Lifting and moving furniture in preparation for cleaning, stripping and sealing or carpet cleaning.

Other factors which may affect the risk of manual handling injury include:

- The actions and posture assumed for the task
- The load being lifted, carried or moved
- The work environment ie. the workplace layout, processes and equipment
- The training, experience and characteristics of the employee.

To minimise the risk of manual handling injuries, it is a requirement that, wherever practicable, equipment be used which will reduce manual handling and that this equipment be checked and maintained regularly to ensure safe operation eg:

- Automatic scrubbing machines
- Wall mounted vacuum systems where they are available
- Long handled equipment or step ladders for high cleaning
- Lighter or smaller machines
- Trolleys for mop buckets and equipment
- Smaller rubbish bags or lightweight bins on wheels
- Padded handles on floor polishers to reduce vibration
- Floor polishers and other machinery with adjustable handles
- Mechanical lifting equipment or ramps for unloading equipment from vans.

The client or controller of the workplace should be consulted to eliminate the following where possible:

- Constraints on posture eg restricted head room, narrow gangways especially while carrying heavy loads
- Poorly lit areas

- Rough or slippery surfaces
- Uneven levels or surfaces eg steep slopes or steps to be used while carrying loads.

Where manual handling tasks must be performed, appropriate training and instruction should be provided and the person assessed to be suitable for the job. It is also recommended that:

- Jobs are rotated so that workers move between tasks regularly eg vacuuming, dusting, mopping
- Written instructions be provided on the correct cleaning techniques and the correct method of operating equipment
- Cleaners be trained not to lift heavy, awkward or bulky loads without assistance
- Cleaners are trained to warm up before a shift by stretching exercise, particularly on cold mornings.

The following employees are often at high risk and should receive additional training, supervision and monitoring:

- Young people (without the work experience to sense danger where it may exist) and who are particularly sensitive to spine and joint damage
- Staff with limited experience, skill or knowledge on the job eg new employees
- Staff with limited understanding of the English language (where testing may be necessary to confirm understanding)
- Employees returning to work after an injury and persons with specific disabilities or illnesses
- Staff wearing personal protective equipment or clothing (which may make gripping and handling loads more difficult)
- Pregnant women and women returning to work during the three months after childbirth.

Where lifting is required, the worker should be trained in the correct methods of manual handling ie to make use of the powerful leg muscles rather than using the back or stomach as follows:

- Size up the load first. Get help if needed. Make allowance for the size of the load as well as the weight
- Use the correct foot positions by placing one foot behind the load and the other beside the load about 40cm in front of the other, pointing in the direction in which the load is to be moved
- Maintain a proper hold by allowing the hands to go beneath the load
- Maintain a straight back during the lift (not necessarily vertical)
- Use the force of the leg muscles to start the lift, holding the arms straight and the load close to the body
- Moving the body upward and forward, continue to straighten and lift the body and load.

The reporting of manual handling incidents and accidents and the monitoring of these reports and workers compensation claims to identify trends is integral to the process of eliminating manual handling injuries in the workplace. Reviewing incident and accident reports, identifying trends and consulting with relevant people will assist in determining which tasks pose a more serious problem.

## SLIPS, TRIPS & FALLS

In the cleaning industry, slips, trips and falls are a common cause of injury in many workplaces, but particularly in shopping centres, supermarkets, recreation centres.

Cleaners operating at heights where a fall could cause serious injury or death, ie cleaning external windows or skylights are considered to be at especially high risk and in these situations, reference should be made to the section in this publication titled Working at Heights.

Situations in the workplace which may give rise to an increased risk of slips, trips and falls include, but are not limited to:

- Working on wet surfaces when mopping, scrubbing or stripping floors
- Moving from one surface to another
- Spills which have not been cleaned up
- Chemical over-spray settling on floors
- Inadequate lighting or bad weather conditions
- Insufficient assistance when loading or unloading equipment or when moving heavy or awkward equipment
- Working on uneven surfaces ie stairs
- Performing high-level cleaning without appropriate equipment
- Wearing unsuitable footwear
- Items, boxes, equipment, cords etc. left in a position which may obstruct general traffic flow
- Not taking the necessary care and attention at all times.

To minimise the risk of slips, trips and falls, it is suggested that the client or controller of the workplace be encouraged to:

- Eliminate inadequate lighting
- Eliminate slippery or uneven floors
- Provide non-slip mats in slippery areas or in bad weather conditions
- Remove obstructions (boxes etc) from traffic flow areas.

Adequate training, supervision and on going instruction must be provided to ensure that:

- Cleaners avoid walking on slippery or wet floors wherever possible
- Tasks which create slip hazards are only performed at times when public traffic is least
- Tasks are preformed in an order which minimises walking on wet floors ie mopping is performed after other tasks are complete
- Non slip floor cleaning products are used
- Wet areas are barricaded off or warning signs displayed
- Spills are cleaned and dried up immediately
- Cleaning products are sprayed onto a cloth to avoid overspray
- Long handled or extending equipment is used when performing high level cleaning
- Workers should seek assistance when unloading or loading vehicles or when moving heavy or awkward equipment
- Non slip, preferably rubber, footwear is worn at all times

- Equipment, cables, cords etc are kept tidy at all times and out of the way of general traffic flow
- Special care and attention is taken at all times particularly when working on uneven surfaces or stairs and in heavily obstructed areas.

Cleaners performing high level cleaning are considered to be at particularly high risk. Workers should therefore avoid working at heights whenever possible. Where this is not practicable, those people require additional training, supervision and monitoring to ensure that long handled or extendable equipment is used wherever possible.

Where it is not possible to use extendable equipment it is suggested that an industrial step ladder be provided, one which meets the appropriate Australian Standard and that care be taken to ensure:

- The step ladder is in good condition and is checked and maintained regularly
- The step ladder is set up on a firm, stable, level surface to prevent slipping or movement
- The step ladder is at the right height for the task so as to avoid stretching or reaching
- All locking devices on the step ladder are secure
- Slip resistant shoes are worn
- A second, competent, person be on hand to provide assistance and to hold the ladder when it is necessary to go higher than the lowest two steps
- The user must never use the top two steps of the ladder.

## CHEMICAL HANDLING

Chemical handling in the cleaning industry usually occurs in the following forms:

- Decanting chemicals from one container to another
- Diluting chemicals with water
- Storing chemicals
- Cleaning up spills
- Transporting chemicals (delivering and unloading chemicals to sites).

Hazardous substances used in the cleaning industry include:

- Hydrochloric acid and phosphoric acid in toilet cleaners
- Tetrachloroethylene in carpet cleaners and spotters
- Sodium hydroxide in oven cleaners
- Sodium hypochlorite in bleach
- Petrol in blowers, litter vacs and other.

Risks associated with handling chemicals in the workplace, whether they are classified as hazardous or not, include:

- Over-exposure to fumes in areas without adequate ventilation
- Severe irritation, burns or blindness as a result of splashing or spilling chemicals onto the skin or in the eyes
- Exposure to dangerous fumes as a result of mixing chemicals
- Slips or falls as a result of spilling chemicals onto the floor
- Manual handling associated with lifting and moving chemical containers.

To minimise the risk of Injury or harm from handling or exposure to chemicals, it is required that the use of hazardous substances be eliminated wherever possible. Where this is not practicable, it is recommended that:

- Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS's) be reviewed for each hazardous substance used in the workplace
- An assessment be made of the risk of injury or harm which could occur as a result of exposure to each one
- Appropriate controls are put in place to manage those risks.

When handling chemicals, it is required that:

- All chemical containers are clearly labelled to identify the contents
- Material Safety Data Sheets be placed at hand wherever chemicals are being used and staff be trained in their use
- Personal protective equipment be provided and used as specified on the MSDS ie gloves, safety glasses, masks, aprons
- Staff receives adequate induction and on-going training in chemical handling
- Staff using chemicals be supervised and monitored appropriately
- Unsafe situations which cannot be remedied immediately be isolated and reported to the employer using the appropriate hazard reporting procedure.

It is also recommended that:

- Water or a high pressure hose be used instead of chemicals where possible

- Cleaners be trained to use minimum dilution rates or controlled dispensers be installed
- Barricades and warning signs be used to prevent access by the public
- Cleaning operations be carried out when passing pedestrian traffic is minimal
- Chemicals never be mixed
- Chemicals be stored in a cool well ventilated area
- Decanting of chemicals be avoided as far as possible by purchase of ready to use containers
- Dilution of chemicals be avoided by installation of diluting systems wherever possible
- Appropriate containers be used (eg squeeze bottles rather than spray bottles where there is a risk of skin or eye irritation)
- Chemicals be used, stored and transported in accordance with manufacturers instructions
- Spillage be cleaned up immediately and wet areas be isolated
- Unsupervised chemical storage areas must be locked at all times.



## CHEMICAL MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST

		Yes/No	Comments
1.	Are all containers of chemicals adequately labelled?		Contact the supplier for either labels or a container with a label on.
2.	Have MSDS been obtained for all chemicals in use?		Contact the supplier.
3.	Does the workplace have a chemical register listing the chemicals used at the workplace?		See form 1.
4.	Has an assessment of the risks of exposure to chemicals been carried out?		See form 2.
5.	Have recommended control measures been documented?		Document and action all controls and review their success.
6.	Have recommended control measures been put in place?		Failure to control hazards exposes the company to legal prosecution.
7.	Are there written procedures for the introduction of new chemicals to the workplace?		Safety work procedures must be written.
8.	Is air monitoring necessary? If yes, has this been scheduled and a competent person appointed to do it?		Contact the Risk Manager for advice.
9.	Has a training program for people using chemicals been established?		This is a legal requirement.
10.	Have all the people who should be trained under the training plan received current training?		This is a legal requirement.
11.	Are health checks necessary? If yes, have these been scheduled and a competent person appointed to do them?		Contact the Risk Manager for advice.
12.	Are dangerous goods stored in compliance with the Dangerous Goods Regulations?		
13.	Have emergency procedures been established and documented?		
14.	Are waste chemicals disposed of appropriately? Are there written procedures for this?		Contact the chemical supplier for advice.

## ELECTRICITY

While electricity is probably the most useful resource available in the cleaning industry, it is also potentially the most dangerous.

When working with faulty equipment or in wet environments, workers may be exposed to electric shock which can be fatal. Electrical hazards in the cleaning industry workplace include:

- Working in wet areas
- Using poorly maintained or faulty equipment
- Working with damaged leads, extension cords and adapters
- Inexperienced and untrained staff.

To minimise the risk of Injury from electrical hazards, it is essential that:

- The client or controller of the workplace provide power points protected by RCDs (Residual Current Devices), commonly known as “safety switches”
- Portable RCD units are provided wherever protected outlets are not available
- The client or controller of the workplace is encouraged to provide enough outlet sockets to avoid the use of extension leads and adapters
- All equipment is kept in safe working order through a system of regular inspection, testing and maintenance according to the appropriate Australian Standard
- All electrical repairs are carried out by a licensed electrical worker
- Only heavy-duty flexible cords are used on electrical cleaning equipment
- Workers have access to emergency procedures in case of electrocution or fire.

It is also considered necessary that:

- Electrical equipment not be used in wet areas wherever possible
- Cord restraints be fitted to all electrical equipment to avoid straining electrical connections
- Splash proof or waterproof electrical equipment is used instead of standard equipment.

It is also recommended that adequate training, supervision and on going instruction is provided in electrical safety to ensure that cleaning staff:

- Take special care and attention when working with electrical equipment, at all times
- Check electrical equipment before commencing each shift, for damaged or severely kinked cables, faulty connections, exposed wires and damaged plugs
- Isolate or lock out damaged or unsafe electrical equipment immediately, report the fault to the supervisor/management using the correct reporting procedure and display a “Danger Do Not Use” notice on the equipment
- Keep leads off wet surfaces and away from heat, oil and chemicals, to avoid damage
- Always switch off electrical equipment after use, at the power point, and disconnect by pulling the plug, not the cable
- Wind cords up loosely and from the machine end first to reduce kinking etc
- Loop extra lead over appliance handles (where no cord restraining device is fitted) to avoid straining electrical connections
- Wear rubber soled shoes to provide insulation
- Do not attempt to repair cord faults with tape
- Cleaners performing wet area cleaning are considered to be at particularly high risk. These workers require additional training, supervision and monitoring to ensure that safe electrical work practices are used, extreme caution is exercised and rubber soled shoes are worn at all times.

## SHARPS

Sharps are any objects that are capable of penetrating the skin. Injuries caused by sharps may penetrate the skin and allow infectious diseases such as Tetanus, Hepatitis C and HIV to enter the body.

Sharps are common in the cleaning industry and may take the form of:

- Broken glass
- Discarded syringes
- Sharp metal objects eg damaged edges of metal rubbish bins
- Sharp objects hidden under other rubbish in bins.

Employees at the following sites are considered to be at high risk and may require additional training, supervision and monitoring:

- Schools and other sites where vandalism is common
- Hospitals
- Taverns and hotels
- Prisons
- Any sites where the public has unrestricted access.

To minimise the risk of manual handling injuries, it is recommended that handling sharps be avoided wherever possible. Where it is not possible to eliminate the hazard, it is recommended that:

- Cleaners use bins on wheels, trolleys or strong canvas bags rather than plastic bags for emptying rubbish
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) such as heavy-duty gloves and tongs be provided and used when handling sharp objects or picking up syringes
- Specially designed puncture-proof sharps containers be provided and used for disposing of syringes
- Vaccination (eg Hepatitis B) is provided in high-risk work environments. Apply an antiseptic and a
- Close liaison with the controller of the workplace be maintained to improve the work environment wherever possible.

Where sharps handling is necessary, it is recommended that appropriate instruction and on-going training be provided to ensure that cleaners are vigilant in identifying sharps hazards and reporting them to management. All cleaners should be trained to:

- Not put their hands where their view is obstructed (eg high shelves and behind toilets where discarded syringes may have been deposited)
- Wrap broken items adequately to prevent cuts during handling
- Never push rubbish down with their hands and instead use another puncture-proof container such as a waste-paper bin
- Always check for sharp edges eg nails, splinters etc and use heavy-duty gloves when moving furniture or emptying metal rubbish bins.

Additional instruction and on going training should be provided to employees handling discarded or used syringes and needles to make sure that cleaners:

- Cover open cuts or sores with a waterproof bandage
- Always use heavy duty gloves and tongs when handling used syringes

- Don't touch the sharp point of a syringe
- Pick up the used needle by the blunt end, away from the point
- Put the needle and syringe, point first, into the sharps container
- Do not overfill the container – seal when 3/4 full
- Make sure the container is tightly sealed
- Put the sealed container in a puncture proof bin. Do not put needles and syringes down toilets or drains.

A procedure should be developed and documented for instances where an employee is injured by a used needle or comes into contact with blood which may be contaminated eg:

- Wash the area gently with soap and running tap water
- Apply an antiseptic and a clean dressing
- Notify the supervisor and/or management immediately using the correct reporting procedure
- Place the needle in a puncture-proof sharps container and take it with you to the doctor
- Attend a doctor or the Casualty Department of the nearest Hospital for treatment within 24 hours
- Report again to the supervisor and/or management again using the correct reporting procedure as soon as possible after treatment.

## WORKING ALONE

Workers in the cleaning industry often work alone after normal business hours when there is a greater risk of violence in the form of verbal abuse, threats, harassment and physical assault.

A cleaner is considered to be working alone if:

- They are working on their own
- They cannot be seen or heard by another person and
- They cannot expect a visit from another worker or member of the public for some time.

Hazards associated with working alone should be assessed in each individual situation, but may include:

- Greater exposure to outside elements ie intimidation, violence, threatening behaviour, robbery, attack etc
- Inability to communicate after an incident or accident
- Lack of assistance in an emergency.

Other factors affecting the risk of injury include:

- The length of time the person may be working alone
- Personal factors such as the person's age, gender size, appearance
- Nature and/or location of the working environment ie inadequate lighting, isolation of the premises, workplace surroundings
- Time of day (especially after dark) – for travel to and from the workplace and for entering and leaving the premises
- Unsecured public access to the cleaner's workplace
- Working behaviour ie set routines, complacency, level of awareness
- Level of instruction, training and experience of the employee.

### High Risk Situations

An employee working alone and travelling from site to site without emergency communication is considered to be at greater risk, it is therefore recommended that this practice be avoided. Where this is not practicable, a procedure for regular contact must be implemented eg the employee calling their supervisor on arrival at each site, at agreed times during their shift, or at the end of their shift.

To minimise the risk of injury, it is recommended that administrative procedures arrange for employees to work in pairs/groups and for work to be performed in daylight hours wherever possible.

Where this is not practicable, it is recommended that those sites presenting the greatest risk to employees be cleaned closest to daylight, that appropriate staff be selected for the job (having due regard for EEO legislation), and that these employees:

- Be separated from potential hazards wherever possible ie lock themselves inside the building
- Be made aware of the hazards associated with working alone and be provided with adequate information, instruction and on-going training in all associated procedures
- Have access to a telephone or communication device
- Have access to and be trained in an emergency and evacuation procedure
- Have access to and be trained in a communication procedure for the contact of co-workers, security and/or police
- Be provided with additional personal protection ie personal duress alarms
- Have access to first-aid facilities.

## WORKING AT HEIGHTS

Workers in the cleaning industry are often at risk of falling from heights when cleaning high external windows and skylights and when cleaning high external surfaces such as building walls and roofs. A fall from such heights may cause serious injury or death.

Situations which may lead to an increased risk of a fall include:

- Working next to unprotected open edges openings or holes
- Working on slippery moving or unlevel surfaces
- Working on a surface not capable of supporting a load
- Moving from one surface to another
- Unsuitable footwear or caught clothing
- Unsuitable handling of loads
- Equipment tools or rubbish obstructing the work area
- Ladders used incorrectly
- Unsatisfactory lighting or bad weather conditions such as high wind or rain
- Being struck by a moving or falling object
- Exposure to chemicals or electricity
- Fall arrest systems and devices not used or used incorrectly
- Lack of training and emergency procedures.

To reduce the risk of falling from heights, it is recommended that workers avoid working at heights where possible by using extensions on cleaning equipment wherever possible. Where this is not possible, it is essential that supervision and/or assistance by a competent person be provided where necessary and that consideration be given to:

- The use of edge protection
- The use of elevating work platforms, cherry pickers, crawl boards, safety steps, scaffolds, personnel cages and suspended scaffolding
- The correct use of ladders.

It is also a requirement that adequate instruction, supervision and on going training is provided to ensure:

- The correct use of ladders
- The correct use of suitable fall arrest systems and devices
- The use of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Workers are familiar with emergency and rescue procedures.

Where it is necessary to use portable ladders, these should conform to the appropriate Australian Standard. Incorrect use of ladders is the cause of a large number of falls from heights across industries. It is suggested that:

- The ladder should be in good condition and be set up on a firm, stable and level ground. It should be secured to prevent slipping and sideways movement
- The base of the ladder should be no more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  its height away from the wall
- The base rungs and steps of the ladder should be slip resistant
- Slip resistant shoes must be worn
- Sufficient platform area is available for stepping off the ladder

- The ladder should be the right height to prevent stretching or reaching
- The ladder to be secured or held by another person
- The ladder extend at least one metre beyond the stepping off point
- All locking devices on the ladder are secure
- A fall arrest system should be in place if there is any likelihood of a free fall
- Metal or wire bound ladders are not used close to energised power lines.

Where abseiling is required or where fall arrest systems and devices must be used, it is recommended that advice from WorkSafe be obtained and acted upon before commencing work.

## BACK PACK VACUUM CLEANERS

Backpack vacuum cleaners have become very common in the cleaning industry over recent years. Although backpacks are popular for their convenience and efficiency, users need to be aware of the correct techniques for putting on and using these vacuum cleaners, as well as the hazards associated with their use.

Hazards associated with the use of backpack vacuum cleaners include:

- Manual handling
- Electric shock or fire in the unit
- Tripping over the cord
- Motor noise close to the operator's ears
- Accidental bumping of passers-by and property
- Respiratory irritation caused by dust emissions.

Other factors affecting the risk of injury include:

- The posture which must be sustained while lifting, putting on and using the unit backpack
- Personal factors, such as the person's age, height, weight, strength, experience and physical disabilities or handicaps
- How long the task will take
- The design and layout of the building and furniture
- The degree of familiarity of the employee with the task and associated training
- Selection/purchase of appropriate equipment (especially the weight of the machine)
- Storage of and access to the equipment.

To minimise the risk of manual handling injury when putting on the backpack it is suggested that the unit be stored in a position which allows easy access, preferably on a raised table or in a position raised from the floor to reduce the need for lifting.

A suitable technique which should be used to lift the backpack is:

- A straight back be maintained while lifting the unit
- The unit to be held close to the body whilst lifting
- The dust bag is empty when lifting to reduce the load

Whenever possible, when putting on or removing the back pack:

- A second person should assist the user
- The backpack should be placed on both shoulders simultaneously.

To adjust the back pack for fit it is suggested that an appropriate procedure is used which will transfer the weight away from the neck and shoulder muscles to the hip region and directly through the leg muscles (being the strongest muscles in the body):

- The unit be positioned at the lower arch of the back
- The waist strap be adjusted to fit snugly
- The shoulder straps be adjusted close to the body to take up the slack without being too tight.

To minimise the risk of manual handling injuries while handling the back pack:

- Utilise as many sections of tubing as required to ensure the operator, short or tall, can stand upright when vacuuming

- Upper body movement is reduced by using a lung forward movement of the legs, keeping the feet pointing in the direction of the wand
- Hold the wand 10 to 20 cms below elbow height to ensure the best posture for maximum use of body weight.

When using back packs over long periods:

- Operator effort may be reduced by the use of power heads
- Where possible, vary the duties so that the opportunity to relax muscles is available
- Take the unit off and stretch for some minutes – around ten minutes is necessary to allow the inter-vertebral discs to return to their normal shape
- Frequently empty the dust bag so that less weight is being carried by the operator and the machine is working at maximum efficiency
- Consider the use of hearing protection which conforms to the relevant Australian Standard.

To minimise the risk of electric shock or fire in the unit:

- Use an effective cord restraint and keep the cord away from the operator's feet
- Use an RCD fitted to the cord, or plug into an RCD protected outlet
- Make sure the unit is regularly serviced, maintained and tested according to appropriate Australian Standards to eliminate electrical faults
- Check the cord for internal kinks or nicks and visible wires at each end of the cord before each use. If either fault exists, do not use the machine and report the fault using the correct hazard reporting procedure
- Unplug the cord by grasping the plug securely after switching off the machine at the unit and at the switch
- Lay the entire cord out on the floor when using the machine to reduce the risk of heat build-up in a coiled cable
- Check the position of the cord continuously during use to ensure it does not become caught on or under furniture, doors, skirtings etc
- After switching off and unplugging the machine, always rewind the cord from the machine end towards the plug to reduce twisting and kinking of the cord
- Rewind the cord in even loops and do not twist around the arm.

To minimise the risk of other common injuries:

- Avoid using the back-pack close to passers-by to prevent accidental bumping
- Constantly check that the cord is away from property to prevent damage and away from the operator's feet to prevent tripping over
- Make sure the unit is regularly serviced, maintained and tested according to appropriate Australian Standards to minimize the risk of worn parts which may cause excessive noise
- Although noise levels of a well-maintained unit are generally acceptable, ear protection conforming to the appropriate Australian Standards is strongly recommended, especially when using over a long period
- Suitable induction and on-going training should be provided to employees required to carry out the task.

## DUST

Dust is a broad descriptive term for tiny solid particles carried in the air. Due to the nature of cleaning work, exposure to dust is almost constant in the cleaning industry. Exposure to dust should be assessed in each individual situation, but factory and warehouse environments may be particularly vulnerable.

It is important for employers to make themselves aware of workplaces where employees may be exposed to hazardous type dusts eg asbestos. These dusts may be a common hazard in industrial processing areas and will require special assessment in consultation with the client and/or a qualified consultant to determine the most appropriate preventative measures.

The body has defence mechanisms in the nose, throat and lungs to remove particles of dust from the system. Depending on the amount and type of dust, the mechanism can be overloaded and may result in health problems.

Hazards relating to dust include:

- Occupational respiratory diseases
- Irritation to eyes, ears, nose and throat
- Irritation to skin
- Risk of dust explosions and fires
- Unpleasant odours
- Damage to equipment.

To reduce exposure to dust, it is recommended that:

- Cleaners use in built wall vacuum systems where they are available
- Consideration be given to purchasing vacuum cleaners with sealed dust bags
- Vacuum cleaning machines preferably have a dust bag which filters dust particles to 0.05 microns
- Rubbish containers are sealed to reduce airborne dust.

It is also recommended that cleaners be trained to:

- Take special care when emptying dust bags to limit airborne dust
- Cleaners dust with moistened dusting cloths rather than dry cloths
- Storage areas be kept tidy and free of dust
- Equipment is kept clean and free of dust
- Maximise ventilation where there is a risk of excessive airborne dust
- Wear dust masks and goggles whenever there is a risk of excessive airborne dust, particularly in factories or warehouses
- Wear goggles when dusting high level areas to prevent dust from falling into the eyes
- Report build-ups of dust in inaccessible areas using the correct reporting procedure.

## NOISE

Noise is often overlooked as a health risk in the cleaning industry. This is probably because injuries caused by noise are not obvious immediately. The damage tends to occur over a period of time. Exposure to excessive noise can cause people to suffer permanent damage to their hearing.

Most people find noise unpleasant and this can have a detrimental effect on their work and well being. For these reasons, it is important that noise be considered a part of any risk-management strategy.

Sources of noise in the cleaning industry include:

- Garden blowers and litter-vacs
- Pressure cleaners, portable carpet cleaners and floor polishers
- Vacuum cleaners, particularly backpack vacuums because of their close proximity to the user's ears.

To reduce the risk of hearing damage, it is recommended that:

- Consideration be given to buying quieter equipment when purchasing
- Noisy equipment be isolated, reported using the correct reporting procedure and replaced or repaired immediately
- Equipment is maintained regularly to reduce noise caused by worn parts
- Older equipment be maintained more often to reduce the risk of noise due to worn parts
- Exposure to noise be reduced by rotating workers from noisy to quiet tasks
- Hearing protection (ear muffs or ear plugs) which conform to the appropriate Australian Standards be provided where necessary and workers be trained in its use
- Ongoing monitoring be conducted to ensure workers are not exposed to excessive noise
- Ongoing training is provided to increase workers' awareness in relation to noise control.

## FIRST AID

Employees in the cleaning industry often work on sites isolated from other co-workers making access to emergency treatment difficult. Employers have an obligation to ensure appropriate first-aid facilities and procedures are available to employees.

It is therefore required that, as a minimum:

- A first-aid box clearly marked with an Australian Standard-compliant sign be provided on each site
- The first-aid box contain basic requirements and additional items appropriate to the workplace
- The boxes are immediately accessible to all employees
- The boxes be adequately maintained and items replaced or added to as necessary.

It is also recommended that:

- The names and contact numbers of first-aiders are provided and readily visible
- The telephone numbers of emergency service providers are provided
- Instructions for emergency first-aid treatment of injuries are provided.

All employees should be provided with information, instruction and training regarding:

- The location of first-aid boxes and first-aid information in the workplace
- Emergency procedures
- First-aid procedures, including how to contact first-aiders
- The procedure for reporting of hazards, incidents and injuries in the workplace
- Standard precautions for the control of infection and blood-borne infections.

Training should be provided:

- When an employee is first employed (at induction)
- If there is a change in the location of first-aid facilities
- If there are any changes in the first-aiders' details or contact number
- At regular intervals.

Training for first-aiders should be provided in the form of a Workplace First-aid course accredited by the relevant state training authority.