



# Housekeeping Best Practices

**HUB Risk Services**

**Hospitality Practice**





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## INTRODUCTION

Housekeeping in the hotel industry is one of the most physically demanding and risk-prone jobs, involving a range of safety hazards. These include ergonomic risks, slip and fall hazards, chemical exposures, biohazards, electrical risks, and fire hazards. This guide provides a comprehensive approach to identifying these risks, offering examples and actionable mitigation strategies.

## ERGONOMICS AND INJURY PREVENTION

Housekeepers often engage in tasks that require repetitive movements, bending, reaching, and heavy lifting, which can lead to musculoskeletal injuries such as strains and sprains.

### Risks

- **Lifting heavy objects** (e.g., mattresses, laundry bags, cleaning supplies)
- **Repetitive movements** (e.g., vacuuming, making beds, scrubbing surfaces)
- **Awkward postures** (e.g., bending over to clean floors or tubs, reaching up to clean high shelves)

### Examples

- **Back injuries** from improperly lifting heavy loads like full laundry carts or mattresses.
- **Shoulder and neck strain** from repetitive overhead movements like dusting and changing curtains.
- **Wrist and elbow injuries** from repetitive scrubbing or vacuuming.

### Mitigation Strategies

- **Proper Lifting Techniques:** Train staff to lift with their legs, not their back. Use carts and lifting devices whenever possible.
- **Rotate Tasks:** Alternate between different tasks to avoid repetitive strain on specific body parts. For example, switch between cleaning rooms and folding laundry.
- **Adjustable Tools:** Provide ergonomically designed tools like adjustable mops and vacuums with proper handles to reduce strain.
- **Stretching Programs:** Encourage daily stretching exercises before and after shifts to prevent muscle stiffness and improve flexibility.



## SLIP, TRIP, AND FALL HAZARDS

Housekeeping often involves working on wet or slippery surfaces, such as freshly mopped floors or bathrooms with water spills, increasing the risk of slips, trips, and falls.

### Risks

- **Wet floors** after mopping or spills
- **Obstructed pathways** due to cleaning equipment, carts, or cables
- **Uneven surfaces** or loose carpets in hallways and rooms

### Examples

- **Slip injuries** from a wet bathroom floor or freshly mopped lobby without proper signage.
- **Trip hazards** caused by cleaning equipment, vacuum cords, or cluttered workspaces.
- **Falls** from ladders while cleaning high surfaces or changing light bulbs.

### Mitigation Strategies

- **Proper Signage:** Always use “Wet Floor” signs when cleaning or mopping floors. Ensure these signs are visible and remain in place until the floor is dry.
- **Slip-Resistant Footwear:** Require housekeeping staff to wear non-slip shoes designed for wet or greasy surfaces.
- **Cord Management:** Keep vacuum and equipment cords organized to prevent tripping hazards. Use cord covers or retractable cords where possible.
- **Inspect Work Areas:** Conduct regular inspections to ensure that carpets, tiles, and walkways are free from tripping hazards.

## CHEMICAL SAFETY AND HAZARD COMMUNICATION

Housekeepers regularly use a wide variety of cleaning chemicals, many of which can pose serious health hazards if not handled properly.

### Risks

- **Chemical burns** from corrosive cleaning agents.
- **Respiratory issues** from inhaling fumes, especially in poorly ventilated spaces like bathrooms.
- **Accidental mixing of chemicals** (e.g., bleach and ammonia) that can produce toxic gases.

### Examples

- **Skin burns** from direct contact with concentrated cleaning chemicals used in bathroom or floor cleaning.
- **Respiratory irritation** from inhaling strong fumes in enclosed spaces during cleaning.



- **Toxic gas exposure** due to the accidental combination of incompatible chemicals.

### Mitigation Strategies

- **Safety Data Sheets (SDS):** Ensure SDS for all cleaning chemicals are readily accessible, and train staff on how to read them.
- **Proper Ventilation:** Encourage housekeepers to open windows or use exhaust fans when using chemicals in enclosed spaces.
- **PPE Usage:** Provide gloves, goggles, and masks to protect skin, eyes, and respiratory systems. Ensure that appropriate PPE is used when handling chemicals.
- **Chemical Storage:** Store chemicals in properly labeled containers, and ensure they are kept separate to prevent accidental mixing.

## BIOHAZARD EXPOSURE

Housekeepers may encounter biohazards in the form of blood, bodily fluids, or waste, particularly when cleaning rooms or bathrooms.

### Risks

- **Exposure to pathogens** in bodily fluids or used syringes.
- **Handling sharp objects** like broken glass or needles without proper protection.
- **Cross-contamination** when cleaning multiple rooms without proper sanitization.

### Examples

- **Needle stick injuries** from improperly discarded needles in trash bins.
- **Bloodborne pathogen exposure** when cleaning up blood or vomit without proper PPE.
- **Contamination spread** due to cleaning staff handling biohazard materials without proper disinfection practices.

### Mitigation Strategies

- **Use of PPE:** Always wear gloves and other protective gear when handling waste or cleaning potentially contaminated areas.
- **Biohazard Disposal:** Provide puncture-resistant containers for the disposal of sharp objects like needles. Train staff on proper disposal procedures.
- **Proper Disinfection:** Use EPA-registered disinfectants for cleaning any area exposed to bodily fluids. Follow hotel protocol for cleaning such areas to prevent contamination.
- **Handwashing Protocols:** Encourage regular handwashing, particularly after handling waste or cleaning restrooms.



## ELECTRICAL SAFETY

Housekeepers use a variety of electrical equipment, such as vacuums, floor polishers, and washers/dryers, which pose electrical shock and fire hazards.

### Risks

- **Electric shock** from using damaged cords or improperly grounded equipment.
- **Fire hazards** from faulty or overheated equipment.
- **Water and electricity hazards** from using electrical equipment in wet areas.

### Examples

- **Electric shock** from a frayed cord on a vacuum cleaner.
- **Equipment overheating** and causing a small fire due to dust accumulation in air vents.
- **Water-related electric shock** when using equipment in bathrooms or near wet floors.

### Mitigation Strategies

- **Regular Equipment Inspections:** Routinely inspect all electrical equipment for damage to cords or plugs. Replace or repair any faulty equipment immediately.
- **Grounded Outlets:** Ensure that all electrical devices are plugged into properly grounded outlets.
- **Water and Electricity Separation:** Do not use electrical equipment in wet areas. Dry floors completely before using any electrical cleaning devices.
- **Emergency Shutdown:** Train housekeeping staff on how to turn off electrical power in case of an emergency and have easy access to emergency stop buttons for larger machines.

## FIRE SAFETY

Housekeepers may encounter fire hazards when working near electrical appliances, laundry rooms, or while using certain chemicals.

### Risks

- **Flammable chemicals** that can ignite under certain conditions.
- **Overheating appliances** in laundry rooms.
- **Clogged dryer vents** causing a fire hazard.

### Examples

- **Fire risk** from leaving laundry dryers running unattended or failing to clean lint filters regularly.
- **Chemical fire** when using or storing cleaning chemicals near heat sources.
- **Improperly stored rags** that have absorbed cleaning chemicals and can self-ignite.



### Mitigation Strategies

- **Proper Chemical Storage:** Store all flammable chemicals away from heat sources and electrical equipment.
- **Laundry Equipment Maintenance:** Clean dryer vents and lint filters regularly to reduce the risk of fire. Never leave dryers running unattended.
- **Fire Extinguisher Access:** Ensure housekeeping staff know the locations of fire extinguishers and are trained to use them.
- **Fire Evacuation Drills:** Participate in regular fire drills and know the emergency evacuation routes.

## STRESS AND FATIGUE MANAGEMENT

Housekeepers work in fast-paced environments, often under time constraints, which can lead to mental and physical fatigue. This can increase the risk of accidents.

### Risks

- **Physical fatigue** from long shifts with continuous physical activity.
- **Mental stress** due to time pressures, leading to distractions and mistakes.
- **Burnout** from repetitive tasks without breaks.

### Examples

- **Fatigue-related accidents**, such as dropping heavy objects or failing to notice a slippery floor.
- **Decreased focus**, leading to improper chemical handling or missing hazards in a room.

### Mitigation Strategies

- **Frequent Breaks:** Ensure that staff take regular breaks during shifts to rest and recover. Encourage hydration and stretching during breaks.
- **Reasonable Workloads:** Avoid overburdening housekeeping staff with too many rooms or tasks. Manage workloads to allow for safe and effective cleaning.
- **Stress Management Programs:** Provide access to stress-relief programs, including mental health resources and support from supervisors.

## LADDER SAFETY RISKS

Ladders can pose various hazards if not used properly, including falls from heights, tipping ladders, or overreaching while on a ladder. These risks are heightened when ladders are used in wet, crowded, or uneven areas like bathrooms or guest rooms.

### Risks

- **Falls from height:** Climbing too high on a ladder or losing balance.
- **Ladder tipping:** Using ladders on uneven surfaces or failing to secure the ladder.
- **Overreaching:** Stretching too far while on the ladder, causing imbalance.
- **Slippery surfaces:** Using ladders in wet or oily areas, leading to slips.



### Examples

- **Fall injury:** A housekeeper stands on the top rung while cleaning a light fixture, losing balance and falling.
- **Ladder collapse:** A ladder tips over in a bathroom because it was placed on uneven, slippery tiles.
- **Shoulder strain:** An employee overreaches while changing curtains instead of moving the ladder, leading to a shoulder injury.

### Mitigation Strategies

- **Proper ladder height:** Choose a ladder that allows you to work without standing on the top two rungs.
- **Stabilize the ladder:** Always ensure the ladder is on a flat, stable surface. Use a ladder with slip-resistant feet.
- **Position carefully:** Set the ladder at the correct angle (4-to-1 rule for extension ladders) and lock it securely before climbing.
- **Avoid overreaching:** Move the ladder closer to the work area rather than overextending your body.
- **Check for wet floors:** Dry any slippery surfaces before setting up a ladder, and use non-slip footwear for better grip.

## CLOSING

This guide emphasizes the importance of safety in housekeeping operations, focusing on preventing injuries and hazards that commonly occur in the hotel environment. By adhering to these best practices and continuously educating staff on new safety protocols, hotels can ensure a safer and healthier workplace for their housekeeping teams. Regular safety training and audits will also help keep risks under control, leading to a cleaner, safer, and more efficient operation.

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