

Fire Safety & Good Housekeeping in Office Spaces

Maintaining a safe office environment requires a strong commitment to good housekeeping practices and fire safety awareness. These practices not only help prevent the outbreak of fires but also ensure that, should a fire occur, its spread is minimized. One of the primary concerns in fire safety is managing fire loading—a measure of the potential fuel available to a fire within a given space.

Understanding Fire Loading

Fire loading refers to the amount and type of combustible materials present in an area under normal use. In an office setting, common items that contribute to high fire loading include:

- Large or numerous stacks of paper, excessive and uneven
- Excessive and uneven stacks of books and file boxes
- Paper waste and packaging materials
- Non-fire rated decorative items such as fabrics, curtains, and upholstered furniture
- A high fire load significantly increases the risk of a fire spreading quickly, potentially overwhelming initial response efforts and compromising evacuation routes.

Housekeeping Practices to Reduce Fire Loading

Control Combustibles

- Keep paper stacks and boxes to a minimum.
- Regularly dispose of paper waste and recycling to avoid accumulation.
- Do not use decorative materials that are not fire-resistant.

Maintain Orderly Storage

- Storage must be organized to prevent the creation of fire hazards.
- Avoid excessive stockpiling of materials in any one area.
- Store items in bookshelves or cabinets, not on the floor.
- No storage is allowed in electrical or mechanical rooms.

Storage & Exit Requirements Per Fire Code

Exit Paths and Clearances

- Ensure at least 32 inches of clear width for exit paths in offices, classrooms and storage areas.
- Never store items in a manner that blocks or could block doors, hallways, equipment or other egress paths.
- Do not store items in a manner that would block audio or visual alarms.
- Ensure 36 inches of clearance around electrical panels, fire extinguishers or other safety equipment.
- **Quick Tip:** the width of the path to the exit should not be less than the width of the exit itself.

Vertical Clearance from Ceiling

To support effective sprinkler or manual fire suppression:

- In sprinklered buildings: Maintain at least 18 inches of clearance between combustibles and the sprinkler head deflector.
- In non-sprinklered buildings: Maintain at least 24 inches of clearance from stored items to the ceiling.

This clearance is critical to:

- Allow smoke and heat to rise, activating suppression systems in time.
- Ensure unobstructed distribution of water from sprinklers.
- Prevent the premature spread of fire into ceiling voids.

Examples of Poor Housekeeping or Excessive Fire Loading

