

Occupational Safety in Brief

Maintenance and care of premises



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Publisher: The Centre for Occupational Safety,
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Text: Matti Santalahti, Näkemys Osakeyhtiö
Jukka Mäkeläinen, The Centre for Occupational Safety
Juha Hämäläinen, The Centre for Occupational Safety
Aulikki Penttinen, The Centre for Occupational Safety
Editor: Aulikki Penttinen
Translation: Terttu Kaustia
Photographs: Kari Rissa, ISS, L&T:n kuvapankki
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To the Reader

The booklet *Occupational Safety in Brief* is based on the occupational safety guide revised in 2007. It is focused on the maintenance of premises, that is, mainly caretaking and cleaning work. This guidebook deals with the central issues in Finnish occupational health and safety culture from the viewpoint of the maintenance of premises.

The aim of the booklet is to support the guidance of new workers, and it is meant to be distributed to new workers. The goal is to go over orally the matters described in the booklet together with the workers, to visit the work sites, to present documents and introduce key persons, and instruct the workers in other suitable ways.

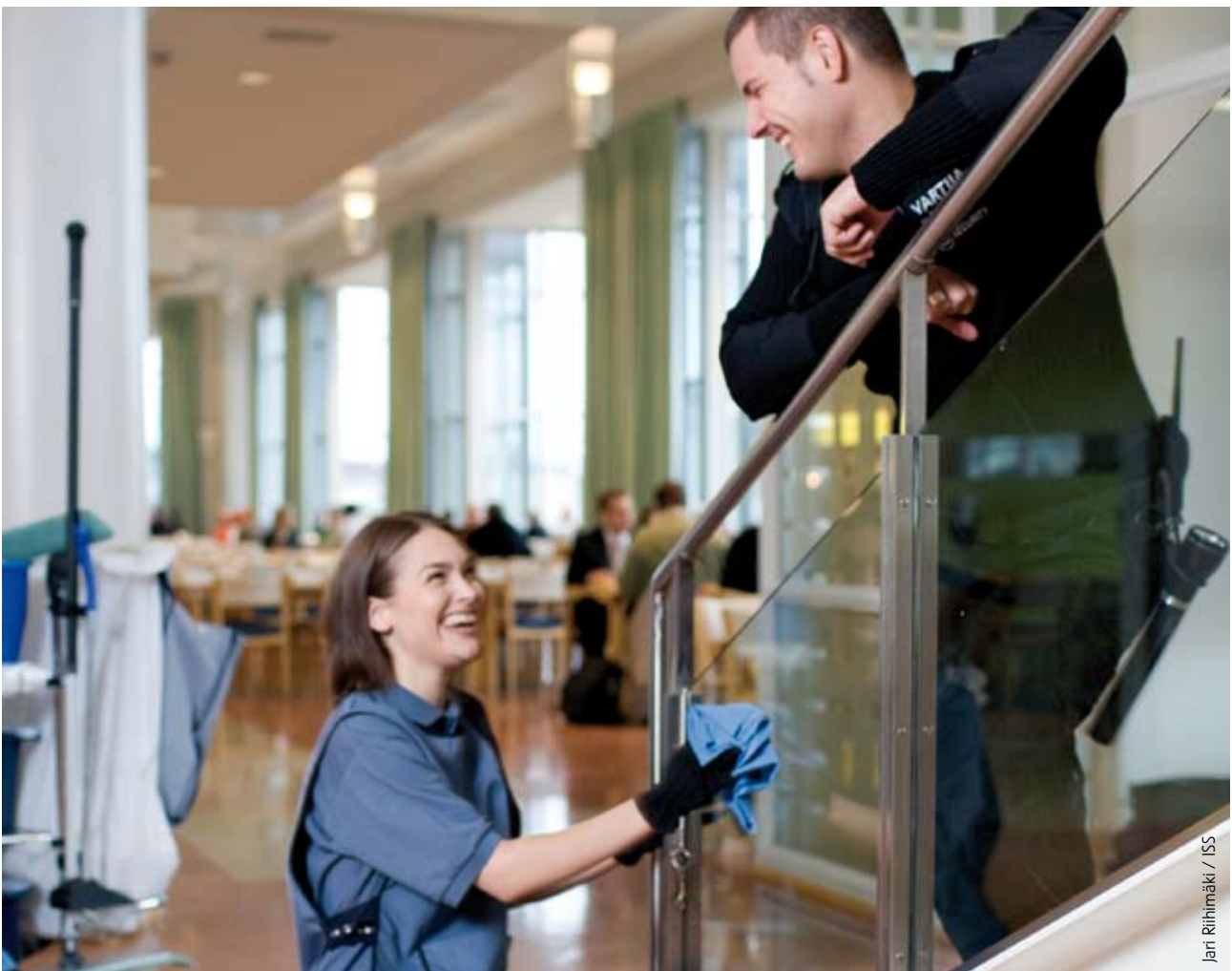
The guide is useful for Finnish as well as foreign workers. It has been translated into Russian, Estonian, Swedish and English. The booklet can be printed from the website of the Centre for Occupational Safety at www.ttk.fi/julkaisut.



Safety in the maintenance and care of premises

Labour protection and safety are a part of the everyday routines at work; they are a part of everyone's work tasks. Supervisors and foremen must consider safety aspects in their decision-making. The supervisors are responsible for the workers' safety and health at work, the working condi-

tions, the safety of machines and equipment, work instructions and guidance, as well as the planning of work. The workers' awareness of safety means safe and healthy working habits. Safety is also a part of professional skills and mastery of the work.



Jari Riihimäki / ISS

Safety at the workplace

The safety requirements at work are based on the Occupational Safety Act (738/2002), which is complemented by decrees. The law determines the minimum occupational safety requirements, and also the employer's and employees' responsibilities for preventing accidents and health hazards at work. Also other statutes and regulations related to work safety must be taken into account.

The employer is responsible for safety

It is the employer's responsibility to make sure that the work is safe and does not involve any danger or hazard to the worker's health. This means that, in addition to ensuring the safety of the working conditions and work equipment, the worker's personal characteristics and skills must be taken into account.

The worker must be given sufficient information about the hazards and risks at the workplace, and taught safe ways of working. The worker must be given the necessary work equipment and personal protectors, and guidance in how to use them.

Dangerous or otherwise exceptional work tasks must be planned and described beforehand, and the workers need to be instructed carefully. Before the work is started, the employer makes sure that the foreman as well as the person doing the work are qualified for it and have enough work experience. In the case of workers who are under 18 years of age, the statutes and regulations concerning young workers must be taken into consideration. Working in a team does not lessen the employer's obligations, and the supervisor is still responsible for safety matters.

Occupational safety at the common workplace

Maintenance and cleaning tasks are usually done in another employer's premises. The employers must see to it that everyone is given enough information and instructions, and knowledge of the measures needed to tackle the hazards in the work, for instance, fire safety, first aid, and rescue manoeuvres. The employer takes care of the safety training of his own employees. The firm purchasing the maintenance services is responsible for instructing the workers about the risks of the work and the dangers at the workplace.

Occupational Safety Card

Many employers require that workers hired from outside the firm have an Occupational Safety Card. It certifies that the person has attended a one-day



training session in occupational safety. The employer purchasing the maintenance services is responsible for the worker's safety card training, if needed.

Preventing general hazards at work

Some general hazards may be present for instance in shopping and business centres. In such cases the employers and independent workers must inform each other about the hazards in their own activities, and how to eliminate them. They can then agree about the necessary rescue and safety measures.

The safety obligations of firms using hired employees

The Occupational Safety Act also applies to employers who purchase the services of workers hired from an outside agency. The employer must ensure the safety and health of the hired workforce during the working hours. It is especially important to make sure that the workers are instructed carefully regarding the work and the working conditions, and other arrangements, if needed.

The workers' obligations

The worker must carry out the work tasks with care, and follow the instructions given by the employer. If the worker notices hazards or neglects in safety, which he or she is unable to eliminate for some reason, such as lack of possibilities or technical skills, the worker must report these to the supervisor and the occupational safety delegate of the workplace. The worker has the right to get feedback concerning the reported hazard.

Collaborative action for safety at the workplace

Collaboration concerning occupational safety at the workplace is described in a statute on the inspection and control of safety at work (44/2006).

Direct collaboration

Direct collaboration in occupational safety issues takes place as a part of the everyday routine at work. The supervisor and workers make it their habit to discuss together the work and how to solve problems that come up in the work. The plans and suggestions made together by the work group are a good way of improving safety and well-being at work.



The needs to develop the work can be brought up at regular weekly meetings. They can be dealt with when planning work tasks and projects together. Development needs should be discussed between the supervisor and subordinates, and in the development discussions between the supervisor and each employee. If it is not possible to handle the matters inside the work unit, the matter should be brought to the attention of the line management or occupational safety organization.

Indirect collaboration

In workplaces of over 10 people, the workers select an occupational safety and health representative from among themselves. His or her job is to represent the workers and help them in questions related to safety and well-being at work. Two substitutes are chosen for the occupational safety delegate. It is possible to have several occupational safety and health representative. An occupational safety chief is the employer's representative in the occupational safety collaboration meetings. His or her duty is also to assist the supervisors in acquiring occupational safety expertise.

If there are at least 20 employees at the workplace, an occupational safety committee or some other form of collaboration is established.

The central task of occupational safety personnel is to disseminate information on occupational safety, and to chart and follow up the safety of the work and working conditions, and to suggest improvements. The line organization, that is, the employer and his representatives, are responsible for the safety and healthiness of the work and working conditions.

The employer can tell the occupational safety organization to draw up the occupational safety action plan which is required by law. The action plan describes how the employer aims to promote the workers' safety and well-being. The plan is based on the assessment and follow-up of the work and working conditions. The action plan is supplemented by work instructions, the action plans of the occupational health service and the occupational safety committee, as well as the enterprise's other safety plans. The action plan can also include other measures or principles related to safety at work, such as instructions on fire safety, first aid, or traffic.

Occupational health services

The employer is obligated to arrange occupational health services for the employees. Their purpose is to prevent work-related diseases and accidents, and to promote the health and safety of the work environment, the workers' health and work ability, and the functioning of the work community. Occupational health services are available to all employees, regardless of the form or length of their work contract. A worker can go to the occupational health service unit if he or she suspects that he has fallen ill as a result of the work, or has been injured in an accident at work. The occupational health services stipulated by law do not include treatment for diseases that are not related to the work. The employer may, however, include medical and other health services in the work contract.

The occupational health service personnel visit the work sites and carry out workplace surveys. Based on these, they suggest measures to improve the working conditions and the well-being of the workers. The trial period of a new worker often includes a health examination. Health examinations can be carried out at specified time intervals of a few years, or by examining a particular occupational group. The occupational health personnel may also teach more ergonomic working habits and give advice on healthier living habits. They may organize physical exercises (for instance, 'neck school', 'back school'), and refer the worker to individual rehabilitation, if needed. They may also arrange training in first aid, etc.)



Kari Rissa

Supervision of occupational safety and health

The task of occupational safety districts is to promote collaboration between the employer and employees, and to control that the safety legislation is observed. Occupational safety inspectors inspect workplaces and give advice on safety and on the terms of work contracts, as well as guidance to individual workers, employers, and representatives of the employees.



Nina Dahl / ISS

A safe work environment

In a good work environment the worker is able to carry out his or her work efficiently, safely and in a meaningful way. The safety of the work environment is ensured by maintaining and improving these possibilities continuously.

Recognizing hazards in the maintenance and cleaning of premises

The work in the maintenance and cleaning of premises is independent, and the worker often faces the hazards alone. It is therefore especially important that everyone knows the risks in their work. The possible hazards need to be discussed together, and everyone can express their thoughts and experiences about their own work. The supervisor's job is

to document the hazards and dangerous situations systematically, and to keep them up to date.

When the dangers have been recognized, the employer is responsible for assessing the risks. The probability of a dangerous incident and its negative effects are taken into account. The extent of the risk can be expressed either verbally or in numerical form. The greater the risk, the more crucial are the measures for controlling it.

For example, working on a ladder is a notable risk. The risk of falling is very great, and the consequences can be serious. Therefore, the work must not be started until the ladder has been replaced by a proper work surface which is much safer.

The following examples help how to recognize hazards in the work of cleaners and other maintenance workers.

Recognizing danger: Cleaning Work

Hazards in cleaning work

The following risk factors may lead to an accident or affect the health of cleaners:

- Continuous loading of the musculoskeletal system, for example:
 - the handling of heavy loads (carrying and moving floor care machines, waste and garbage bags and furniture)
 - physically heavy work tasks, such as washing windows
- Prevention, elimination, suggestion for improvement:
- instruction in safe working habits, working in pairs, good condition of work clothes and shoes
 - using ergonomic tools and equipment
 - influencing the size of the areas to be cleaned
 - proper cleaning closets
 - use of washing machines (for washing cleaning equipment)
 - work task rotation
 - Risk of an accident (tripping, slipping, falling) leading to sprains, bruises, fractures

- condition of floor surfaces
- slipperiness of outdoor areas
- cleaning of cupboards and shelves
- safety of electric appliances, defects in electric cords
- sharp objects (in trash bins, work spaces, etc.)
- threat of violence.
- Hazards in traffic and transport
- Noise hazard
- Unclean indoor air
- Cleansers on skin or in eyes
- Danger of infection from contact with, for example, secretions, contaminated needles, etc.
- Psychosocial work environment
 - requirements of the work > improving working skills, getting guidance and good leadership
 - working alone > team work, reorganizing the work, possibilities for interaction (meetings, etc.)
 - piling up of work > having a system of substitutes
- Other hazards:

A safe work environment

Recognizing danger: Caretaking Jobs

Hazards in a caretaker's work

The following risk factors may lead to an accident or affect the health of caretakers:

- Continuous loading of musculoskeletal organs
 - lifting heavy loads may cause back problems
- Danger of falling from a height
 - washing windows, work on roofs, raising flags
- Foot injuries
 - slipping (sprains, fractures), sharp machine blades, stones flung from a machine, falling tools (cuts, bruises)
- Hand injuries from using machines and tools
- Noise and exhaust fumes
- Driving a tractor or other work vehicle
- Tripping, knocking against objects (bruises)
- Winter tasks
 - shovelling snow, sanding, etc.
- Poor indoor air
 - dust, etc.
- Asbestos, mould, etc. especially respiratory hazards
- Chemicals
 - cleansing solvents, defrosting substances, etc.
- Electric shock
- Infection from contact with harmful substances, etc.
 - secretions, contaminated needles, etc.
- Threat of violence
- Other hazards:

'Zero accidents' goal, and analyzing work accidents

Many enterprises today are committed to the 'zero accidents' goal, which is based on the idea that every work accident can be prevented. This means that every accident and every near-accident at work is reported immediately to the supervisor and the occupational safety delegate. The supervisors see to it that the causes of the accident are investigated. In this way similar accidents can be prevented later. The accident must be reported also to the accident insurance company in order to get compensation.

Work spaces

In caretaking work, the work spaces are usually located on the premises of the client enterprise. The work spaces must be safe for all workers.

Order and tidiness

Usually caretakers have at their disposal a service hall or corresponding room. The meaning of tidiness and order in accident prevention is especially important if machines are used in the hall, or if maintenance vehicles are also kept there.

Falling, slipping and tripping are common work accidents in caretaking work. Accidents like this can be prevented by keeping the work spaces tidy and in order. The condition of footwear is also very important.

Internal workplace traffic

When working in the yard or parking area, different types of vehicles are used for removing snow or for cleaning. Slipperiness is a problem outdoors in the winter, and in damp indoor areas.

In working hours, it is often necessary to use public traffic routes when travelling from one work site to another for repairs or other tasks, or to a cleaning site. Travelling takes place by foot or by bicycle, or as a driver of a machine, car or work vehicle. The workers are vulnerable to various commuting accidents. To prevent these, safe routes should be used, and a helmet should be worn when riding a bicycle. Enough time should be reserved for moving from one site to another.

Sand dust

Sand dust is a problem especially in the springtime when sand is removed from the streets and yards after winter sanding. The amount of dust can be decreased by moistening the sand, by removing the dust from the cabin of the sweeping machine, and by filtering the air coming into the cabin, and overpressurizing the cabin.

Machines and equipment

The employer must make sure that all the machines and work equipment are safe and comply with CE requirements. They must be suitable for the tasks they are used for. They must also be serviced

and repaired sufficiently so that they are in order during their entire functioning time. Instructions on how to use the machine are provided with the machine (in Finnish and in Swedish if needed). The employer must also make sure that proper guidance is given in the safe operation of the machine. Young workers are not allowed to use machines that have a particular danger of cutting or crushing, for example, a four-wheel lawn mower. A young worker can use machines and devices equipped with protective shields, or if it can be ensured in some other way that the work is not harmful to health and does not entail danger of an accident.

In caretaking and cleaning work the customs of the workplace are important from the viewpoint of machine safety. The condition in which equipment that has been in common use is left at the end of the day affects the noticing of dangerous faults. Machines must be cleaned regularly, and noted flaws or their possibility must be reported. In this way the next user's possible accident can be avoided. The risk of an accident grows in dis-

turbance situations. For instance, when a clogged machine is being cleaned, it may restart unexpectedly. Haste and wrong ways of working increase the risk.

Dangerous tasks in the maintenance of premises

Electric safety

Fixed electric installations and the repair of electric appliances must be done only by electricians registered in the register of electrical contractors of the Safety Technology Authority (Tukes).

A caretaker also does some minor electric jobs. When doing them, one must be especially careful. Before starting the work, all electric cords and devices must be disconnected from the electric mains, and the worker must be familiar with the instructions regarding the work task and electric safety.



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A safe work environment

Minor electric tasks include, for instance

- changing a fuse plug (a handle fuse must always be changed by an electrician)
- connecting a lamp to an electric cubicle in the ceiling
- replacing a broken contact plug of an electric appliance, an electric wire and the intermediate switch.
- preparing and repairing a one-stage extension cord
- removing and attaching the lid of a wall socket
- tasks related to at most 50 voltage alternating-current or 120 voltage direct-current appliances, for example installing a solar element.

The electrical safety of a cleaner is influenced by the condition of the electric cords of cleaning machines, and the electrical safety of the rooms to be cleaned (wall sockets, loose electric cords in the room, etc.). It is especially dangerous to use defective machines in wet rooms. Any noted defects must always be reported immediately.

Fire safety

Fire safety is important at one's own workplace (for example in the maintenance hall) and in the spaces of the client enterprise. The work tasks must be organized so that the risk of a fire is minimal. The employer names a person who is responsible for fire safety and evacuation.

Caretakers and cleaners must be familiar with the fire safety instructions of the work site. These can be found in the safety and rescue plan of the enterprise. Every employee must be instructed in case of an emergency: where are the safe exits from the building, how to alarm the rescue centre, and where the nearest fire extinguisher is located, and how to use it.

Fire work and a permit for doing fire work

Fire work includes gas welding, arc welding, fire cutting and arc cutting, disk cutting and the grinding of metals that causes sparks, and also jobs that require a gas burner, other open fire or a hot air blower. The caretaker can carry out fire work at a permanent fire work site, such as a maintenance hall that has been designed so that there is a separate area for doing fire work. Fire work can also be done at a temporary fire work site, for instance on the premises.

The workplace must have a plan for supervising fire work. It can be a part of the safety plan. The employer takes care of instructing the workers, and when necessary, is responsible for their qualifications and permits. Insurance companies require that workers who do fire work get training for a 'fire card', in other words, a permit that qualifies a person to carry out fire work.



High-pressure water work

The employer makes sure that the risks of a high-pressure water work site have been charted, and hazards eliminated or minimized in advance. The employer's task is also to ensure that the work equipment is always checked before leaving for work, and the work is done only by persons trained for this type of work.

Asbestos – a health hazard

Asbestos is found in buildings built before 1988, for instance in ventilation systems, as insulation of pipes, in building facades, floors, ceilings and wall panels. Asbestos has also been used as a building material, for fire protection, and as sound insulation.

Asbestos causes cancer, but usually the disease develops decades after the exposure. Caretakers or cleaners can be exposed to asbestos when servicing and cleaning old buildings. The employer has the primary responsibility to make sure that structures to be demolished do not contain asbestos, and that sites that do contain asbestos are marked and enclosed safely. The demolishing of asbestos-containing structures or insulation must always be done by trained professionals. Caretakers and cleaners must be given safety instructions that apply to the premises in question.

Working in high places

Caretakers work in high places when carrying out various maintenance tasks, for instance on roofs to remove snow, and when raising a flag. The management makes an agreement with the client concerning safety measures against falling. When needed, the worker must use proper safety ropes and harnesses. Before using them, the workers and supervisors must learn how the protectors function, and how to use them correctly. If necessary, the work in a high place is done with the aid of a personal hoist.



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The falling hazards of cleaners usually occur in window washing, and the wiping of surfaces, ceilings, ventilators, etc. Cleaners must be provided with stands and long-handled cleaning equipment, and if needed, personal hoists and safety harnesses.

Ladders are to be used only as a temporary aid and for single short tasks, like attaching and detaching a hoist. They are not to be used as a work stand. All actual work is done on work stands or personal hoists.

A-step-ladders can be used as a work stand only in rooms where the height is normal for short-term work, or when for some other reason it would be unreasonable to use a work stand. When using an A-step-ladder, the floor surface must be hard and smooth.

Handling and moving waste materials and garbage

Handling a garbage bag involves risks. The bag must not be filled right to the top. In this way it is possible to get a firm grip of the top of the bag. Then with a two-hand grip, the bag is tilted so that one corner of the bottom can be grasped easily. If it is heavy, the bag is taken away with a cart.

Garbage bags must never be pressed or squeezed, because they may contain sharp materials that can injure. The garbage bags of public kitchens and restaurants may contain broken glass, sharp objects or contaminated needles. Injuries can be prevented by wearing cut-proof protective gloves. Needles are put in a collection capsule or closed container.

Pest control

The usual pests found on premises are rodents (rats, mice), insect pests in foodstuffs, flies, ants, cockroaches, and birds. The emphasis in pest control is preventive action with an emphasis on effective housekeeping and cleaning.

Pests are controlled with mechanical devices or chemicals. Before chemicals are used, it is always important to read the safety data sheet describing the product, and to ensure that the product is used correctly. It is also important to use proper personal protectors.

Garden work

Using a motorized lawn mower involves risks. Stones may be flung by the mower's blade, or the operator's foot may slip too close to the revolving blade. Especially the unevenness of the lawn or slipperiness after rain increase the risk. The operator of a motorized lawn mower must be at least 18 years old, and safety shoes must always be worn. When using a revolving lash cutter, a face shield must be worn.

A chain saw or powered brush saw are used to cut down trees and clear away bushes. Before starting the work, the supervisor makes sure that the worker has the required skills and has been properly instructed. Suitable protectors are needed: hearing protectors, safety shoes, safety goggles, a helmet and cut-proof trousers. In clearing a dense wooded area, also a face mask is needed.



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A safe work environment

Working alone

Accidents or violence are risks when working alone in maintenance and cleaning tasks. Instructions and an action model are needed in case of a threatening or violent encounter. Guidance and practice are necessary. A threatening situation may arise if, for instance, someone tries to take your keys by force. When working in a client enterprise, the following points must be agreed on:

- what to do when someone attempts to come inside after normal working hours
- who to contact when you notice sabotage, theft, burglary or other criminal action.

Alarm and surveillance systems can be installed at the workplace. The workers can also be provided with a portable alarm or a mobile phone with a quick direct number to the alarm centre or other agreed telephone numbers. In this way it is possible to increase security and lessen the feeling of fear.

Other ways of preparing in advance for threatening situations are:

- following agreed ways of acting, for instance, locking windows and doors when the rooms are vacant
- clear marking of emergency exits and free passage through them
- the necessary arrangements regarding rooms and furniture, and good lighting
- surveillance and alarm systems.

It is important to talk about threatening situations at the workplace with the supervisor and other workmates. An encounter with an aggressive person or other violent incident can cause traumatic stress, so the worker must have an opportunity for psychological debriefing. Help is available for instance from the occupational health service personnel, a health care centre, or regional crisis group. The employer takes care of the necessary work arrangements due to the incident.



Kari Rissa

Health hazards and how to prevent them

Physical health hazards

Noise

The main sources of noise in a caretaker's work are leaf blowers, grinding machines, lawn mowers and certain vehicles (such as a tractor). In a cleaner's work, the work machines and the work space may be noisy.

The risk of a hearing defect from repeated exposure to noise depends on the volume of the noise and the length of exposure. Even low noise levels can cause harmful loading if the work demands concentration or speaking with other persons.

Noise exposure can be reduced by acquiring machines that are as quiet as possible (the noise emission can be found in the information on the machine types) and by keeping the machines in good condition. A worn down machine is clearly noisier than one that is in good condition. Noise exposure can also be reduced by work arrangements. The last means is to use a hearing protector.

Whenever needed, and always when the worker wants, the employer must give the worker proper personal hearing protectors, and the worker has to use them. The noise level of a machine or piece of equipment should be lowered by a technical solution – structural changes or various guards.

Examples of noise volumes in caretakers' work, without hearing protectors:

- | | |
|---|------------|
| • driving a tractor with the cabin ceiling hatch closed | 77–86 dB |
| • driving a tractor with the cabin ceiling hatch open | 89 dB |
| • welding | 83–95 dB |
| • horizontal cutters | 85–90 dB |
| • rotating lash cutters | 105–106 dB |
| • 'backpack' leaf blower | 70–106 dB |

Vibration

Hand vibration is caused, for example, by the rapid back-and-forth movement of a hand tool, such as different kinds of chisel hammers, or from a rotating movement, as in grinding machines. Vibrating machines are used also in gardening work. However, the proper work tools of caretakers and cleaners seldom have serious vibration effects.

Vibration can be prevented by properly caring for and servicing the machines, by taking breaks during the work, by correct working methods and by minimizing the pushing force (the greater the



grip force, the more vibration is transferred from the machine to the hand). In cold weather it is good to wear gloves, because cold aggravates the symptoms.

Lighting

Good lighting improves the work output and speed, and increases safety. In addition, good lighting affects people's alertness and improves job satisfaction. Poor lighting and direct or indirect glare increase tiredness and the risk of accidents. The risk grows as a person moves from a strongly lit room to a dim room.

Lighting is an important factor in work. The supervisor must make sure that the level of lighting is sufficient when working on the client's premises, especially when cleaning staircases, and in spaces where poor visibility is an accident risk.

Thermal conditions – heat, cold

Heat stress depends on the temperature of the air, the heaviness of the work, protective clothing, movement of the air, and the amount of fluids that the worker drinks. Heat stress can occur in cleaning work, for instance when cleaning a sauna and the washing facilities. When working in hot

Health hazards and how to prevent them

and wet conditions, it is essential to take enough breaks and to drink sufficiently.

In outdoor work, cold starts to hinder working when the temperature falls to -10 degrees Celsius. In windy weather, already zero degrees feels uncomfortable. Working in the cold loads the body, and the work seems heavier than the same work in a warm environment. Cold hazards can be reduced by technical measures, by planning and organizing the work, for instance taking breaks and having possibilities to warm up.

In the maintenance of premises, the work sites can change quickly from warm indoor spaces to cold outdoor areas, and vice versa. In quickly changing thermal conditions, the planning of the work and proper clothing are important in preventing harmful loading and health hazards. When a large part of the work is done in thermally demanding conditions, the employer is responsible for providing suitable protective clothing.

Indoor air

Poor indoor air feels stuffy and may smell bad. The cause may be insufficient cleaning or ventilation. The air may also contain various chemicals or biological impurities. The health effects are different kinds of symptoms and diseases. In addition to health hazards, poor indoor air causes discomfort. The cleaner is often the first person who notices moisture damages or a mouldy smell at the workplace. Defects in indoor air should be reported to the supervisor and occupational safety delegate.

Chemical hazards

Chemicals that endanger health

The safety data sheets and usage instructions of chemical substances that are used at work must be placed so that the workers see them. The chemical containers must be marked properly. The workers must be given instruction on the safe use and handling of the chemicals, as well as suitable personal protectors.

Exposure to chemicals

Exposure to chemicals takes place mainly through the lungs and the skin, sometimes also through the mouth. The level of exposure is also affected by the total exposure, the heaviness of the work, personal hygiene (washing one's hands, etc.), and the use and care of protectors. Chemicals are used for cleaning, and opening clogged sewage pipes.

Pesticides and insecticides are dangerous chemicals. The most usual exposure takes place while using cleaning chemicals which may irritate the skin and cause eczema. Protective gloves prevent exposure through the skin.

In the care of lawns and plants, many substances are classified as slightly poisonous, such as fungicides. They are to be handled only by persons who have a permit in spraying chemicals. Dangerous substances are always kept in locked storages. Safety data sheets on their properties and how to use them must be available.

Both granular and liquid fertilizers are used in gardening. When handling them, proper protective clothes (protective gloves and overalls) must be used. In the handling of liquid fertilizers, protection against splashes is necessary. Clean water must be kept available in a bottle, in case the liquid gets splashed into the eyes or on the skin. Such cases must be reported to the supervisor.

When applying lime and other powdery substances, a mask must be worn to protect the respiratory system and the eyes. Lime dust dries the skin. Dust left on bare skin must be rinsed away immediately. For fire prevention reasons, fertilizers, work machines and fuels must be stored in separate spaces.

Preventing exposure

Dangerous chemicals should be replaced by safer substances. Instruction should be given in their use, and personal protectors should be worn. It is important to select the right product for the intended use, to follow the instructions on the correct amount, dilution, and safety measures. Strong chemicals are used for instance in cleaning saunas and swimming pools. Protective gloves must always be worn when handling chemicals, and goggles are used to protect the eyes when measuring and dosing the substances. A respiratory mask may be needed in the handling of certain substances and in certain situations.

Instructions must be available, and they must be followed carefully when dosing the substance from the original package into smaller containers. The containers and packages must always be labelled properly.

Biological hazards

Biological health hazards are present, for instance, in the handling of wastes and garbage. Mouldy indoor air in moisture-damaged buildings is also a health hazard.

The occupational health care of workers who are exposed to biological factors includes a medical examination at regular intervals. They may also be vaccinated against hepatitis, for example, if the work presents such a risk. This is especially important to cleaners and caretakers who work in unhygienic conditions with a risk of infection.

Personal protectors

If the risk cannot be eliminated or reduced sufficiently, the workers must be provided with personal protectors in accordance with the regulations. The workers are obliged to use these protectors.

How to select personal protectors

In the selection of personal protectors, it is important to take into consideration the worker's experiences and opinions about protectors. The user's state of health and personal characteristics are taken into account. The protectors must fit well

after the necessary adjustments. The workers must be told why the protector is necessary and from what it protects, and they must be shown how to use the protectors.

The employer determines the situations when the protectors are to be used and for how long, depending on the loading of the work and the frequency of exposure. The extent of the risk and the characteristics of the workplace affect the choice and use of protectors.

The employer is responsible for purchasing the protectors, and for ensuring their proper functioning by servicing, repairing, and replacing them when necessary. Personal protectors must be kept at the work site where they are used. The storage facilities must be such that the protectors will not be soiled or broken during storage.

Protectors are serviced in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. The persons using the protectors must be trained to check them before and after each use to make sure that they function well. Any defects must be reported to the employer.



Well-being at work – the whole picture

All kinds of work are mentally as well as physically loading to varying degrees. A suitable amount of loading is necessary for a person's well-being. Too much or too little loading can be harmful to health. Total loading is influenced by several factors, such as work content, knowledge and skill requirements, the work environment, the work tools and methods, leadership, the work community, and especially the worker's own skills and know-how.

Activities to maintain well-being at work aim to support the work ability and functional capacity of the entire personnel. They are meant to promote the health of people throughout their work career. The activities can be focussed at developing the work, working conditions, the work community, and at improving the workers' functional capacity and professional skills.

Physical loading at work

The physical loading of work depends on the work postures and movements, and the muscle force needed for the work. It is also affected by the quality of the work environment, as well as the appropriateness and condition of the work equipment. The physical loading of work is good for a person's health when it is in balance with the person's characteristics and functional capacity.

In a cleaner's and caretaker's work, harmful physical loading may be due to repetitive work and lifting and moving heavy objects. Also too little loading is harmful. Physical loading can be reduced by careful planning of the work stages and by using proper technical aids and working in pairs. Taking care of your own physical fitness lessens loading.

Manual lifting and moving of heavy loads

The maintenance of premises usually requires repeated lifting of heavy loads by hand. The employer must assess the dangers in lifting tasks. The assessment must cover the work task, the loads to be lifted, the work environment, and the effect of the lifting technique, as well as the worker's characteristics.

If heavy lifting and transfers cannot be avoided or made safe by improving the work methods and working conditions, the workers must be provided with suitable technical aids, or the work can be done in pairs. The workers must be instructed in the use of the aids and in correct lifting techniques.

Repetitive work

Cleaning is still for the most part manual repetitive work. For instance, the cleaning of floors or

mopping loads the musculoskeletal system and the circulatory system one-sidedly. The loading of repetitive and monotonous work can be diminished by the right work methods, ergonomic tools, having enough breaks, and by practising less loading working habits.

Underloading

Some work is not loading enough, for instance monitoring in a control room. Making the work tasks more versatile, shortening the time of working alone, and work rotation, are ways of reducing underloading.

Mental loading

When the mental and psychological loading of work is in balance with a worker's capacities, he or she is motivated to do the work, and mental well-being develops in a positive direction. It is important to recognize what causes harmful loading, and to continuously improve the prerequisites for doing the work.

Issues to be considered are

- functioning of the work community
- content and requirements of the job
- professional skills
- individual characteristics
- supervision and leadership practices
- quality of the work environment.

Functioning of the work community

Many factors affect the functioning of the work community, such as

- job security
- common goals at work known to everyone
- clarity of work tasks and responsibilities
- practical rules and ways of acting known to everyone
- a learning and developing work community
- leadership that supports the workers' initiative and opportunities for influence
- continuous development of the work and opportunities for the employees to develop
- routines of cooperation (planning of activities, developing the work and safety, etc.)
- social events for all workers
- discussing matters related to work, and handling problem situations constructively.

Individual characteristics

The mental loading of persons doing the same work can be very different. Loading is affected, for

instance, by the person's ability to cope with stress, work skills, and the expectations regarding the work. Also a person's life situation has an effect on how loading and stressful they perceive their work.

Temporary tiredness at work is usually taken care of by pauses in the work and by getting enough rest. Temporary tiredness can be prevented by supporting a person's coping at work. Harmful mental loading or chronic stress can cause serious work exhaustion and burnout.

The individual requirements for coping at work vary from one person to another. To prevent problems in one's work or life situation from piling up uncontrollably, it is important to talk about these with the supervisor. Well-being at work can be discussed also in the development discussions between the worker and his or her supervisor, in the common meetings at the workplace, and with the occupational safety delegate and health service personnel.

In the case of older workers, the following possibilities can be considered:

- the work tasks can be adapted to suit the worker's physical work capacity
- the worker is supported in maintaining and developing his or her professional skills
- the knowledge and experience of an older person should be appreciated and made use of by the work community.

The key points in mental well-being from the individual's viewpoint are:

- I master my work, I have good work equipment, and I feel that my work and the work environment are safe.
- My work is valued and I get feedback for the work I do.
- My supervisor treats me fairly.
- There is enough discussion at work about work matters and common goals .

Possibilities to influence one's work

In the work of caretakers and cleaners it is important to master the work and to have influence over it. This does not mean only professional skill. Control over the work also means that

- the worker can influence how the work is done
- the work feels safe
- the worker knows how to use appropriate work equipment and work methods
- the worker gets guidance, work instruction and training
- knows the expectations of the clients, and how satisfied they are



Nina Deht / ISS

- knows the supervisor's expectations, gets support for the work, and is respected
- can cooperate with the workmates: may be a substitute, can instruct and be instructed, learns from others, works in a pair
- knows the goals of the workplace and knows how his/her own work is connected to them.

Work guidance and instruction

Guidance to the work and workplace, and instruction in the work tasks are a part of occupational safety. Guidance to the work and its hazards is primarily the task of the supervisor. By learning safe work habits it is possible to prevent work-related accidents and diseases. Not only new workers need guidance, but also those who have been away for a long time, or those who are starting in a new job.

In new work sites, the hazards of the work must be assessed, so that the workers are aware of the hazards and of safe work methods. Unexpected

Well-being at work – the whole picture

hazards must also be prepared for, such as disturbance situations and a sudden need for cleaning and servicing tasks. Dangerous situations can also be prepared for by planning in advance what to do.

Work guidance for new workers

The work guidance of a new worker must cover the entire workplace: routines, personnel, organization of the work, work tasks and the expectations related to them. In regard to the work itself, the entire work content is described: the different parts and stages of the work, and what kind of know-how and skills are needed.

The new worker is instructed in the following matters:

- the machines, equipment and other technical aids needed for the work, and their safe use
- general occupational safety issues
- data security questions (confidentiality, etc.)
- the work tasks and the expected output level
- the routines and customs of the client enterprise
- the work objects
- the quality of the work, as agreed with the client
- the limits of responsibility (how the costs of repairs etc. are divided)
- organization of the work and cooperation at the workplace (team, division of work, responsibility and authority questions)
- occupational safety chief, occupational safety delegate, and company trustee and their contact information.

In connection with the work guidance, the new employee is informed about the terms of the work contract, such as wages, working hours, annual vacation and pay, how to act in case of sickness, the meaning of the probationary (temporary trial) period, and the occupational health services. The work contract, which shows the central points agreed on, should always be in written form.

The work guidance must be well planned and systematic right from the start. The plan must be in writing, and the worker should also be given written instructions as aids to memory. The guidance should include a follow-up as well as feedback. It is good to collect the things to be remembered into a folder.

Special attention should be paid to the work guidance and instruction of young workers and summer workers.

Instructing foreigners

Foreign workers must be guided and instructed in a language that they understand.

It must be ensured that the information given in work guidance, especially on safety matters, has been understood correctly, for example

- photographs and drawings are used to illustrate the instructions
- the terminology related to the work is taught in Finnish, by repeating and demonstrating
- the words and terms used in the instructions are translated into the language used by the workers
- the workers are allowed to try out what they have been taught, and they are given feedback
- if there are other persons from the same country at the workplace, their help is made use of
- a 'support person' is chosen at the workplace, to whom the new worker can turn for help in a problematic situation
- it is ensured that the information given is understood correctly
- the new worker is encouraged to ask questions, even if the work has started off well
- the worker is encouraged to learn the country's customs and culture, and to tell about his or her earlier experiences.



Kari Rissa

Improving everyone's safety at work

A safe workplace and well functioning work community

Improving safety at work means everyone's cooperation in practical matters. Increasing occupational safety awareness, risk assessment, and improving working conditions requires that people deal with matters openly and in a goal-oriented manner. In a well functioning work community people's expectations, needs and experiences are in balance with the demands of the work and the opportunities offered by the work.

At a safe workplace

- the hazards of the work have been charted
- the procedure of investigating work accidents has been agreed on in advance
- the active reporting of hazards is encouraged
- there is agreement about the level of order and tidiness at the workplace, and everyone knows their responsibility
- the hazards in traffic and transport have been charted
- the working conditions have been assessed, and agreements regarding them have been made with the clients
- the safety of machines and equipment is at least on the level stipulated by law
- electric appliances and cords are in good condition, and the hazards related to electric installation work are under control
- fire safety has been taken care of at least on the level stipulated by law
- the threat of violence is investigated and controlled in advance
- the physical hazards of the work, such as noise, vibration, poor lighting, harmful temperature conditions and bad indoor air, have been charted
- chemical and biological hazards have been taken into consideration

- the need for personal protectors has been investigated: there are enough protectors, instructions are given in using them, and their use is followed up
- the risk of falling from a height has been charted: instructions have been given on the use of ladders, personal hoists and lifting aids, moving on roofs, etc., and they are followed up.

The following activities promote well-being at work:

- management and leadership practices: the personnel are supported and heard
- training is given in health and safety matters
- the health hazards in the work are assessed, and plans are made together to eliminate them
- health examinations and assessment of physical fitness are organized for the employees, as well as physical recreation, etc.
- various social events are arranged for the staff
- the employees are encouraged to engage in physical activities and sports outside working hours. Physical activity improves mental and physical coping at work. It also benefits the employer to support the employees' physical activities.

The importance of talking about work

In a well functioning work community, people speak openly about matters related to their work. The discussion can take place in different groups and in different connections, for example, face to face with the supervisor, in a group led by the supervisor or without the supervisor, among workmates, or at an event attended by the entire personnel.

A workplace where people talk about matters together is a safe workplace: talking about safety at work creates a good basis for concrete action.



The Centre for Occupational Safety, tel. (09) 616 261, www.ttk.fi

Occupational Safety in Brief

Maintenance and care of premises

The booklet Occupational Safety in Brief is based on the occupational safety guide revised in 2007. It is focused on the maintenance of premises, that is, mainly caretaking and cleaning work. This guidebook deals with the central issues in Finnish occupational health and safety culture from the viewpoint of the maintenance of premises.

The guide is useful for Finnish as well as foreign workers. It has been translated into Russian, Estonian, Swedish and English. The booklet can be printed from the website of the Centre for Occupational Safety at www.ttk.fi/julkaisut.



Knowledge Safety Progress

