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## Caretaking and Cleaning Safe Working Practices

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It is the Council's policy that safe equipment shall be used and safe systems of working adopted in safe work places. Accordingly, this document is the Authority's policy for caretaking and cleaning.

The following points should be noted:-

1. Caretakers and cleaners are to be aware of the Council's and their own Workplace Policy Statements on Health and Safety at Work and of their personal responsibilities to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, their own health and safety at work and the health and safety of others using the premises.
2. All caretakers and cleaners are reminded that there are cleaning materials available to them which contain chemicals which can be dangerous; however, when they are used in the correct manner they are no more dangerous than cleaning materials used in the home. If used incorrectly, however, or without taking proper precautions, they can present a risk. All users of these materials must, therefore, take care at all times when handling them and follow strictly the manufacturer's instructions and any other instructions issued by the Authority including COSHH: Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1999.
3. Detergents  
Some people can develop skin problems when using the mildest of detergents; all users are advised, therefore, to use the protective gloves provided when handling cleaning agents, particularly highly alkaline detergents.
4. Bleach  
"Chlorox" bleach is often used for the maintenance of swimming pools and for toilet cleaning; every effort must be made to avoid splashes on the skin, or in the eyes. All users must know what to do in the event of themselves or others being splashed with bleach; instructions on how to deal with the problems are on the container. The protective gloves and goggles which are supplied must be worn when handling this material.
5. Dilute Acid Cleaners  
A toilet descaler is available for use on badly stained urinal stalls and lavatory pans. This is an acid cleaning agent. When it is used care must be taken, the manufacturer's instructions followed and the appropriate protective clothing/equipment supplied must be worn.

6. Non-mixing of Chemicals  
Under no circumstances must different chemicals, e.g. detergents and disinfectants be mixed. This could result in the generation of Toxic fumes.
7. Storage of Cleaning and Floor Materials  
All detergents, acid cleaning agents, disinfectants and other hazardous substances must be securely locked away in a store cupboard when not in use. Flammable materials e.g. spirit-based liquid wax polish and spirit cleaning agents must be stored in a Fire Resistant Enclosure.
8. Safe Use of Access Equipment  
Every year many people are injured, some fatally, whilst using ladders, step ladders and working platforms supported by trestles. Most of these injuries occur because ladders are not securely placed and fixed. Other causes including climbing with loads, overreaching, or the transfer of slippery substances to ladder rungs from the users footwear.

First rule:- Plan the work and the way to do it from ground level.

Questions to ask before starting work:

- a. Can the ladder be secured to prevent outward or sideways slip?
- b. What are the conditions at the site of work?
- c. Is there a comfortable work position with safe handholds?
- d. Is the ladder long enough?
- e. Is the ladder so flexible that it may cause loss of balance?
- f. Has the user the ability, the training and experience to use the equipment with safety?
- g. Is the strength, surface condition and type of structure suitable to rest a ladder against?
- h. Is the equipment suited to the nature of the work, the type of tools to be used and the weight of article to be fixed?
- i. Are there any overhead cables, e.g. electrical that might cause an obstruction or electric shock?
- j. Make sure the foot of the ladder is on a firm and level surface. Under no circumstances must it be placed upon loose material or other equipment to gain height. Any attachments used to level the feet on sloping surfaces should be designed for that purpose and “CE” marked. It should be firmly fixed. The rung should never be used to support the ladder and take the weight, the stiles are designed for this.

- k. For the safety of the user, always ensure the ladder cannot slip and whenever practicable the top should be securely fixed to a suitable and sound anchor point. Whatever form of lashing is used, secure by using both stiles.

On slippery floors, special care must be taken to prevent movement.

Whilst the ladder is being lashed at the top, there should be someone at the bottom rungs. In schools, wherever practicable, old rubber gym mats are ideal to use under ladder feet.

- l. Always ensure the equipment to be used is in good condition, suited to industrial use, is fitted with non-slip feet and that the inclination of a ladder conforms to the rule of one-in-four inclination, e.g. incline 1 foot to each 4 foot rise.
- m. Where securing at the top is impracticable, every effort must be made to prevent the ladder from slipping sideways or outwards either by sandbags, fixed blocks or stakes embedded in the ground.

Ladder feet can also be fitted with foot pads, caps or sleeves.

- n. If it is impracticable to secure a ladder at the top or foot, then a second person should be stationed at the foot to prevent slip. This precaution is considered to be effective only for ladders and not more than 16 feet/5 m in overall length. The person “footing” should face the ladder with a hand on each side and at least one foot on the bottom rung.
- o. Ladders should extend at least 3 feet 3 inches/1 m above the landing place or above the highest rung on which the user has to stand, unless there is a suitable handhold to provide similar support. This is essential to reduce the risk of overbalancing when stepping off.
- p. The ideal angle for a ladder to be positioned is about 75° to the horizontal as referred to in (l) above.
- q. The rung of a ladder is designed to support the weight of a person, plus any light tools he/she may be carrying. Scaffold boards should not be laid on rungs. Only one person at a time should climb a ladder.
- r. Ladders with wire reinforced stiles must have the reinforcement on the underside when in use.
- s. If there is any electrical hazard, metal ladders, those with metal stile reinforcement or wet ladders must not be used.
- t. Ensure footwear is free from mud or grease before attempting to climb any ladder.
- u. If a ladder is contaminated in any way, it should be cleaned before further use.

- v. Safety dictates ladder stiles be gripped during use. Therefore, only tools which can be carried in a belt or holster may be carried during climbing. All other tools and materials should be raised or lowered on a rope.
- w. It is good practice to have 3 points of contact with the ladder, i.e. 2 hands and a foot or 2 feet and a hand.

**Extension Ladders:**

- a. Extension sections should overlap by a minimum of:
 

Up to 16 ft./5 m closed length	1½ rungs
From 16 ft/1 m to 20 ft/6 m	2½ rungs
Over 20 ft.6 m closed length	3½ rungs
- b. Whenever a ladder is raised or lowered it should be done from the base and ensure the hooks are properly engaged before use.
- c. A ladder can be unsuitable for use in a situation for a variety of reasons such as space available, nature of the work, the physical effort required to raise or lower, or the base on which it will stand allowing slip or slide even with a person “footing”.

**Step Ladders:**

- a. Step ladders or trestles are not designed for any degree of side loading. They should be extended to the full spread and properly level and stable.
 

Any work should be done at right angles. It should never be carried out from the top platform, neither should overhead work require overreaching.
- b. The rear parts of the steps should never be used for foot support.

**Scaffold Towers:-**

- a. When using a scaffold tower, use the safety rails at all times:
  - never climb up to the platform on the outside of the scaffold, climbing up or down must be done on one of the four inside corners;
  - lock or wedge the wheels when the tower is in position;
  - never ride on the tower while it is being moved.
- b. Never throw things up to the platform of the scaffold, nor drop anything down; use a rope for raising or lowering items necessary for the work in hand.
- c. Use a scaffold tower whenever it is necessary to clean an area that cannot be reached safely by a ladder or stepladder, i.e. anything above 15ft/4.5 m.

9. Floors that become slippery

Floors can for one reason or another become slippery and every possible precaution must be taken to prevent this.

Problems can be created through faulty floor maintenance, and lack of due care and attention. Accidents will be minimised if the following precautions are taken:-

- a. **Waxing (Spirit Based Polish)**  
If a floor becomes slippery through over-waxing, the polish should be stripped back to the floor seal and a thin coat of new polish applied. When the polish is dry, the surface should receive regular buffing to keep the polish hard and evenly spread. If slipperiness continues to be a problem it may be necessary to obtain professional advice on the suitability of the polish being used.
- b. **Wet Polish (Water or Spirit Based)**  
Do not walk on wet polish, put up signs as a warning to others. If it is at all possible “lock-off” the area until the polish is dry.
- c. **Wet or Damp Mopping**  
Before work commences put up warning signs. Leave only the absolute minimum of water on the floor so that it will dry quickly.  
  
If it is at all possible “lock-off” the area until the floor is dry.  
  
Failure to follow these precautions has resulted in a number of accidents in Education Establishments.
- d. **Spillage of Food or Water**  
Clean up every spillage as a matter of urgency of “lock-off” the area of the spillage.
- e. **Water Brought into the Building During Wet Weather**  
The provision of adequate barrier matting will reduce this problem, but wet patches may occur beyond the mat area. These must be mopped or wiped dry as soon as possible.
- f. **Outside Steps, Paths, etc.**  
Outside steps and paths must be kept free from litter, leaves or other matter likely to create danger especially during wet weather.

10. Trip Hazards

A number of accidents occur because of tripping and falling. Every effort must be made to eliminate the hazards, e.g.:

- a. Brushes, mops, buckets, etc. must not be left in corridors, outside doors or anywhere else where people going by might trip over them.
- b. Cables of mechanical cleaning equipment must be properly stowed when the equipment is not in use.
- c. Distorted link rubber and other types of door mat must not protrude above mat wells. Loose lying mats should be used only in areas where they will not create a danger, and all badly worn mats must be removed or replaced.

11. Special Hazards

Certain areas have hazards peculiar to them, e.g. laboratories, technology workshops and areas used for pottery. Caretakers and cleaners must be given specialist guidance from the relevant Head of Department, a subject teacher or technician as appropriate before cleaning such areas, e.g. particular care must be exercised when cleaning laboratory sinks/basins where chemicals have been used.

12. Mechanical Cleaning Equipment

Mechanical cleaning equipment when used properly is not dangerous but if it is used improperly accidents may occur.

All users of such equipment must give particular attention to the following points:

- a. The cable carrying the power to the machine must never be allowed to become enmeshed around the moving parts of the machine, or around the machine itself. Should this occur, the power to the machine must be disconnected before an attempt is made to unwind the cable.

\* RCD's should be used when electrical equipment is used.

- b. Examine the power cable for cuts, etc. A machine with a faulty cable must not be used.
- c. A machine must not be left unattended, even for short periods, with the power "switched on". This is particularly important if there are children on the premises.
- d. Only staff who have been given adequate instruction are to use mechanical cleaning equipment.
- e. Only mechanical cleaning equipment, which is in good order, is to be used. If there is a fault, report it to your supervisor or Headteacher.
- f. Equipment must be used in accordance with the manufacturer's guidance.
- g. Adequate footwear must be worn (not open toed sandals).

13. Snow and Ice

During inclement weather caretakers and cleaners must make every effort to provide pathways, giving safe access to and egress from the premises. An adequate supply of sand and rock salt should be kept available.

14. Adequate Lighting

Whenever the premises are used appropriate lighting must be provided.

15. Handyman Duties

As part of their normal duties, site caretakers are expected to undertake simple handyman jobs. This work should be of a minor nature, e.g. replacing door handles, repairing desk hinges, securing premises where a window has been broken. Repairs

requiring the attention of a skilled tradesman, e.g. electrician, plumber, carpenter, etc., should not be attempted. This applies particularly to the electrical systems on the premises.

16. Waste Management

Caretakers have a responsibility for removing rubbish accumulated within buildings and the perimeter. Particular regard must be paid to exit routes and staircase enclosures. High-risk areas such as boiler rooms and storage areas should be checked daily for excessive rubbish. Good housekeeping must be maintained.

17. Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences

Establishments keep supplies of Accident/Occurrence reporting forms, which must be completed in all cases of personal injury (however slight) as a result of an accident arising out of, or in connection with, work. There is a statutory requirement to report an accident that causes absence for more than three consecutive days to the Health and Safety Executive. Further details on accident reporting are contained in the Torbay Council's Health and Safety Manual.

18. These notes, which are designed to safeguard employees and others on the premises, are to be observed by all who might be required to undertake cleaning or similar operations. They are intended primarily for caretakers and cleaners, but are to be taken as applying also to other employees.

Additional advice is available from the Health and Safety Team, Town Hall, Torquay.

**REMEMBER**

**USE EQUIPMENT AND CLEANING/POLISHING AGENTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE MANUFACTURER'S INSTRUCTIONS AND ANY OTHER INSTRUCTIONS ISSUED BY THE AUTHORITY.**