

Health and Safety Guide
for

Custodial Workers



CCOHS Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

Health and Safety Guide for Custodial Workers

Objectives

The guide will help custodial service workers, health and safety committee members and representatives as well as supervisors, managers, engineers, and health and safety professionals to:

- Identify workplace-specific health and safety concerns;
- Develop and implement prevention programs and safe work practices to reduce injury and illness;
- Identify, understand and meet legislated health and safety responsibilities.
- Focus on problem solving through employees' and managers' involvement; and
- Integrate health and safety in all work practices.

Target Audience

The *Custodial Workers' Safety Guide* is intended as a reference for cleaners, caretakers, facilities managers, and anyone who works full-time, part-time or on contract in a building's custodial department.

- **Employers and HR professionals** can use the guide for safety orientation of new employees, to ensure they understand their rights and responsibilities under health and safety law.
 - **Managers and supervisors** review the contents of the guide with employees, to ensure they are aware of workplace hazards and safe work practices.
 - **Health and safety trainers** refer to the guide and use it to create course handouts.
 - **Workers** keep a copy on hand for reference. The guide outlines safe work practices, ways to address and/or eliminate health and safety
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hazards, and who to contact for further information or in an emergency.

- **Joint health and safety committees** refer to the guide at meetings, and use the sample forms and charts as guidelines for creating their own, tailored to the work environment.

Scope

This pocket-sized guide is not intended to be an all-encompassing source on workplace health and safety relating to custodial work. Rather, it is the collaborative work of occupational health and safety experts, peer-reviewed by government health and safety authorities, representatives of workers and employers, and specialists in the field of custodial work.

Detailed information on specific workplace hazards and safe work practices can be obtained from the Inquiries Service of the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS).

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EXPLAIN the importance of safety to employees.

IMPLEMENT safe work practices.

GIVE praise for safe behaviour.

ENCOURAGE participation in JHSC activities.

FOLLOW safety rules yourself and set an example.

PROMOTE safety by providing information such as books, videos, literature etc.

VISIT work areas regularly.

PARTICIPATE in inspections and investigations of incidents or accidents.

KNOW employees personally.

IMPROVE and simplify safe work practices continuously.



2. Health Hazards

Health hazards are caused by exposures to dusts, toxic chemicals, noise, radiation, etc. Workplace exposures can cause short-term and long-term illnesses, which may not be detectable at the time of exposure. Workplace inspections don't always reveal health hazards; it often takes a qualified health and safety professional to identify and evaluate them.

Main Types of Health Hazards in the Workplace

Type of Hazards	Examples
A. Biological Hazards	Infectious bacteria and viruses; toxic moulds, fungi, and bacteria.
B. Toxic Chemicals	Toxic liquids, solids, dusts, fumes, mists, vapours, and gases.
C. Physical Agents	Noise, vibration, heat, sunlight, radiation.
D. Poor Indoor Air Quality	Inadequate ventilation, temperature and humidity. Toxic air contaminants and moulds. Emissions from furniture and flooring materials.
E. Psychological Stress	Stress caused by lack of training and communication, poor work organization, technological changes with out appropriate staff training and orientation, overexertion and negative work environment.

A. Health Effects from Exposure to Biological Agents

Biological agents include bacteria, fungi (yeasts, moulds), viruses, worms and parasites. Biological agents can cause infections, allergies, poisoning, and toxic effects. The following table provides examples of occupations with possible exposure to biological agents.

In many cases less toxic “alternative” or “eco-friendly” products are available for cleaning tasks. Make sure that alternative products are effective and do not introduce any new hazards.

See “Chemical Safety” on pages 68-70 for further information on working with hazardous substances.



1. Determining the Need for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Certain tasks may require the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). This includes:

- Handling construction materials such as wood, metal, and glass
- Building maintenance work
- Landscaping and groundskeeping.

