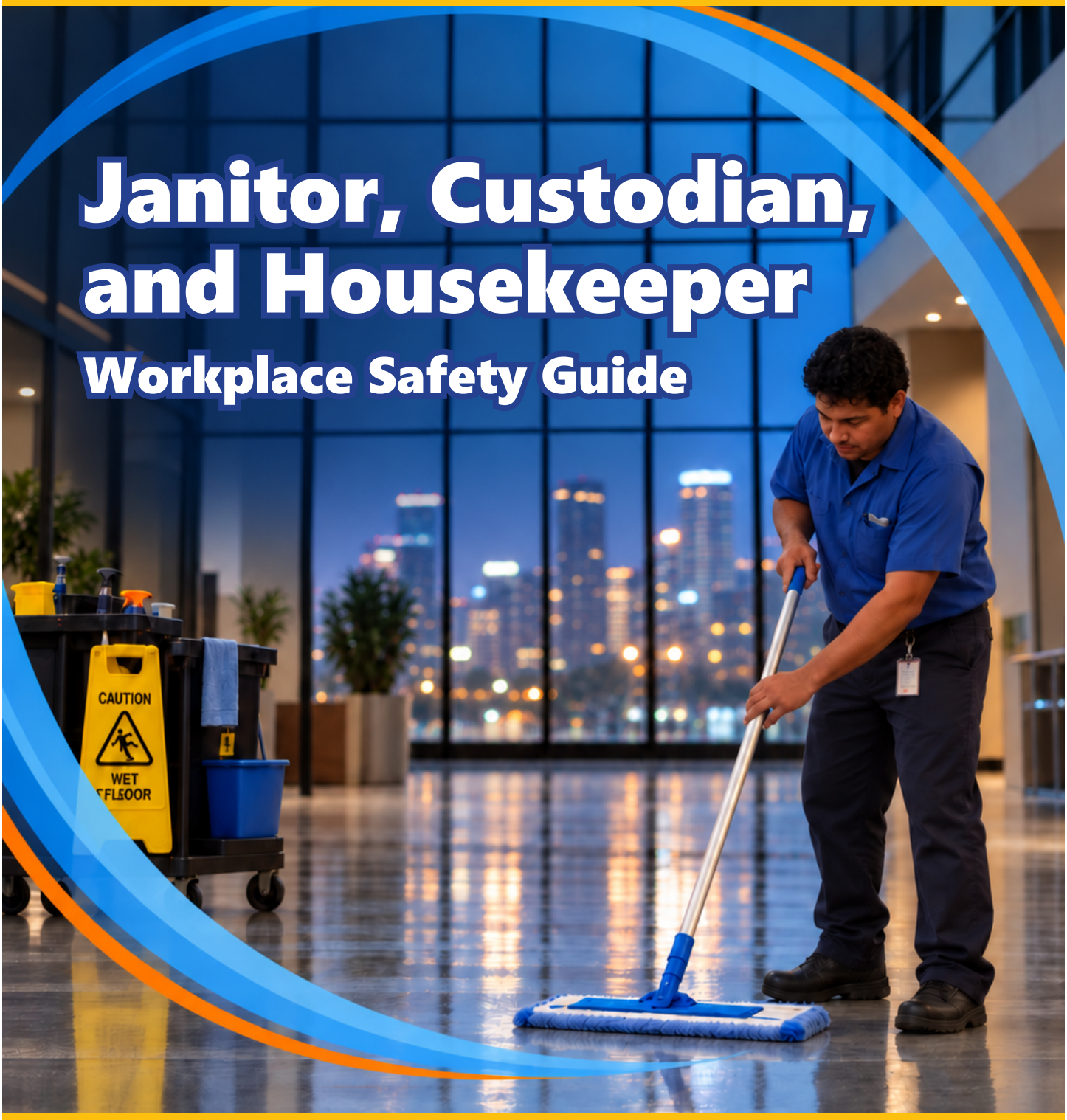
TDI | Safety @ Work

Division of Workers' Compensation

Janitor, Custodian, and Housekeeper

Workplace Safety Guide



Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation
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About this guide

This guide provides practical safety and health information for employers, supervisors, janitors, custodians, and housekeepers. It focuses on everyday work practices, equipment choices, task planning, and workplace conditions that can reduce injuries and make cleaning work safer and easier.

Use it to review how work is assigned, how employees perform common cleaning tasks, and whether changes to equipment, schedules, training, or work methods could reduce risk. Adapt the recommendations to your workplace, equipment, and working conditions.

Preventing injuries protects workers and the organization by reducing missed work, workers' compensation costs, overtime, medical expenses, and other disruptions.

This guide provides general occupational safety and health guidance. It does not replace or change employer responsibilities under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards, or other applicable requirements.

Unless otherwise noted, this document was produced by the Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC) using information from staff subject specialists, government entities, or other authoritative sources. Information contained in this guide is considered accurate at the time of publication. For more free publications and other occupational safety and health resources, visit www.txsafetyatwork.com, call 800-252-7031, option 2, or email resourcecenter@tdi.texas.gov

How to use this guide

You do not need to read this guide from front to back. Go directly to the section that matches the work you do or the safety issue you want to address.

Managers and supervisors can use it to review workloads, equipment, maintenance, training, and work methods.

Workers can compare the recommendations with the way they perform common cleaning tasks.

Safety Officers can use individual sections for orientation, toolbox talks, refresher training, or hands-on demonstrations.

Photos and illustrations show examples of safer methods. Choose methods that fit your workplace and equipment.

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INTRODUCTION



Janitors, custodians, and housekeepers keep schools, offices, hotels, health care facilities, government buildings, and other workplaces clean and ready to use. The setting may change, but many of the physical demands stay the same.

Think about one shift. A housekeeper may strip and remake dozens of beds, push a linen cart, scrub bathrooms, empty trash, and reach above shoulder level again and again. A custodian may mop hallways, move furniture, carry buckets, run a floor machine, clean spills, dust vents, and haul bags to a dumpster. The body feels all of it.

Backs bend. Shoulders reach. Hands grip. Wrists twist. Workers push, pull, carry, scrub, and repeat the same motions hundreds of times. Add wet floors, chemicals, sharp objects, electrical equipment, blood or body fluids, heat, and a rushed schedule, and the chance of injury increases.

Sometimes the better answer is a lighter mop, a longer handle, a better wheel, a smaller load, a hose at the service sink, a cooler work schedule, another person, or more time to do the job safely.

Workers often know where the problems are because they deal with them every day. This guide focuses on what workers and managers can change to make the work safer and easier.

BUILD A SAFER WORKPLACE

Fit the work to the worker

Ergonomics means fitting the job to the worker instead of forcing the worker to fit the job.

If workers struggle with the same task every day, look at the task itself.

- Is the mop handle too short?
- Does the mop become too heavy when wet?
- Does a sticky cart wheel require extra force?
- Do trash bags regularly become too heavy?
- Does a worker have to lift a full bucket into a sink?
- Could an extension tool eliminate repeated overhead reaching?
- Does the schedule encourage rushing?

Managers and supervisors can often reduce strain by changing the tool, equipment, work method, or schedule.

- Watch employees do the work.
- Reduce unnecessary lifting, carrying, reaching, pushing, and pulling.
- Adjust tools to fit the worker when possible.
- Provide equipment that removes difficult manual work.
- Ask whether a change actually helped.



Adjust the tool to fit the worker. A longer or adjustable handle can reduce bending and shoulder strain.

When a worker repeatedly struggles with a task, ask "What can we change about the job?" before asking "What is the worker doing wrong?"

Learn from the people doing the work

The person who uses a mop for six hours knows things about that mop that the person ordering it never notices.

Workers know which cart wheel sticks, which spray bottle leaks, which wringer takes too much force, which vacuum feels too heavy on stairs, and which trash barrels always become overloaded.

Ask them.

- Which tasks feel awkward or difficult?
- Which tools cause problems?
- What takes too much force?
- What slows the work down?
- What would make the job easier?

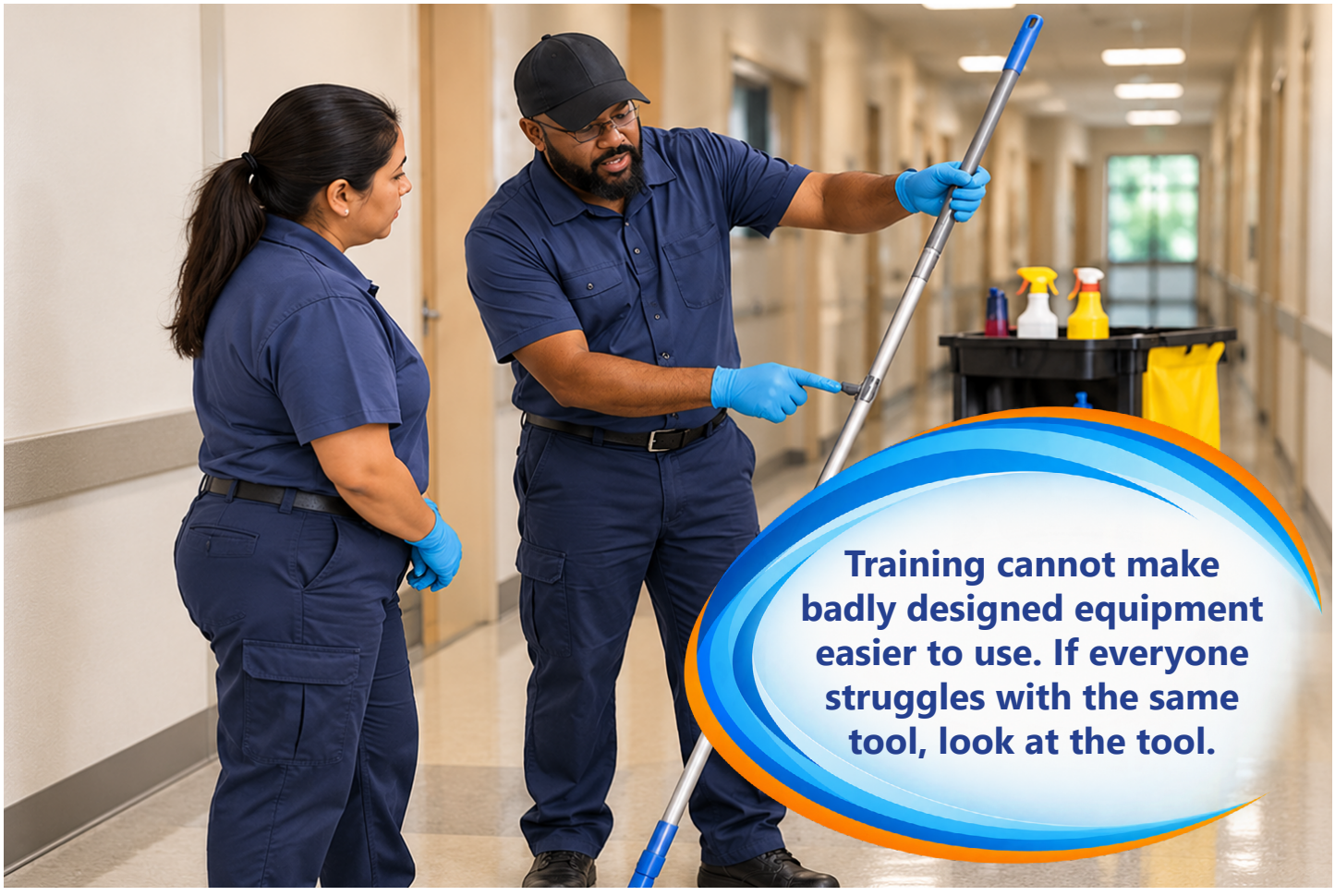
Give workers a clear way to report hazards and damaged equipment, and respond when they do.

Training should match the real work.

Demonstrate the equipment employees actually use and let them practice.

Good training should show workers:

- The hazards of the task.
- A safer way to perform it.
- How to adjust and use equipment.
- What personal protective equipment (PPE) they need.
- How to report problems.
- What to do during an emergency.



Give workers enough time and variety

Too much work and too little time can lead to skipped breaks, heavy lifts, and rushed shortcuts. When planning assignments:

- Allow enough time to work safely.
- Schedule enough people.
- Rotate demanding tasks between workers when practical.
- Follow heavier work with lighter work when possible.
- Plan ahead for deep cleaning, special events, and seasonal work.
- Avoid long shifts and overtime that increase fatigue.

Encourage workers to reduce strain and injuries by:

- Switching hands.
- Changing positions.
- Alternating tasks that use different muscle groups.
- Reporting pain, numbness, tingling, weakness, or unusual fatigue early.

How you assign work is a safety control.

Choose the right equipment and keep it working

A cheap tool costs more when workers struggle with it every day.

Before buying mops, carts, vacuums, buckets, scrubbers, or other equipment, let the people who will use it try it when possible.

Look for:

- Adjustable or telescoping handles.
- Comfortable grips.
- Lightweight equipment.
- Mop heads that don't get too heavy when wet.
- Wheels that roll easily on the flooring.
- Controls within easy reach.
- Tools that fit workers of different heights.
- Replaceable parts.

Then maintain what you buy:

- Clean cart wheels and casters.
- Replace worn parts.
- Repair damaged handles and controls.
- Check cords and plugs.
- Keep guards and safety devices in place.
- Tag damaged equipment and remove it from service.



Small maintenance problems can become safety problems.

MANAGE EVERYDAY WORKPLACE HAZARDS

Slips, trips, and falls

Wet floors, cluttered hallways, and work at heights put cleaning crews at risk for slips, trips, and falls.

- Clean spills promptly.
- Put out signs or barriers before people enter the wet area.
- Leave the signs in place until the floor dries.
- Clean one section at a time when possible so people have a dry route.
- Keep cords, hoses, bags, carts, and boxes out of walkways.
- Report damaged floors, loose mats, poor lighting, and broken handrails.
- Wear footwear suited to wet surfaces.
- Carry loads small enough to see where you are walking.
- Use the correct stepstool or ladder when you need extra height.
- Do not stand on chairs, buckets, desks, or other makeshift surfaces.

Wet-floor signs warn people about a hazard. They do not make the floor less slippery.

Use cleaning chemicals safely







Automatic dispensing systems can reduce contact with concentrated chemicals and help workers use the correct amount.

Familiar products still carry serious hazards. Everyday cleaners can burn skin, damage eyes, and cause breathing problems.

Before using a cleaning chemical:

- Read the label.
- Check the safety data sheet.
- Dilute and use the product only as directed.
- Make sure ventilation is adequate.
- Wear required PPE.
- Know what to do after a spill or splash.

(Continued)

When using cleaning chemicals:

- Use only the amount the label calls for**.** Extra concentrate won't clean better. It raises exposure, damages surfaces, leaves residue, and wastes product.
- Never mix cleaning products unless the manufacturer's directions call for them. Bleach mixed with ammonia releases toxic chloramine gas. Bleach mixed with acid-based cleaners, such as some toilet bowl and rust removers, releases chlorine gas.
- Label every container**,** including spray bottles you fill from bulk products. Store incompatible chemicals apart, and keep heavy containers between knee and shoulder height.

Handle blood, body fluids, and sharps safely

Trash cans, bathrooms, hotel rooms, patient areas, and soiled linens can contain hazards workers cannot see.

Never reach blindly into a container, bag, or pile.

When work may expose employees to blood or other potentially infectious materials:

- Follow the employer's exposure control plan.
- Wear required PPE, such as disposable gloves, a mask with goggles or a face shield, and a gown or apron when blood or body fluids may soak through clothing.
- Use tools, not hands, to pick up broken glass.
- Put any object that can penetrate a worker's skin, such as needles, broken glass, or wires, into approved containers.
- Wash hands after removing gloves.
- Report needlesticks, cuts, or splashes immediately.



Employees exposed to blood and body fluids may have special protections under OSHA's Bloodborne Pathogens Standard.

Use floor machines and electrical equipment safely

Buffers, burnishers, carpet extractors, wet vacuums, and other powered equipment combine electricity, moving parts, cords, and sometimes water.

Before use:

- Get trained.
- Check the cord, plug, switches, guards, handles, and attachments.
- Look for frayed insulation, damaged pins, loose parts, or makeshift repairs.
- Attach pads, brushes, and accessories correctly.
- Check the area for water, obstacles, people, and cords.

While working:

- Keep plugs and cord connections out of standing water.
- Dry your hands before plugging or unplugging equipment.
- Keep the cord away from the machine's path.
- Never pull a plug out by the cord.
- Stop and unplug equipment before changing pads, brushes, or clearing jams unless the manufacturer directs otherwise.
- Tag damaged equipment and remove it from service.



If equipment shocks, overheats, damages cords, or repeatedly trips breakers, stop using it.

Plan for working alone

Custodians and housekeepers may work early mornings, nights, weekends, or in areas where no one is nearby.

Before assigning someone to work alone, plan how to keep that worker safe and how they will get help in an emergency.

(Continued)

Consider:

- Check-in and check-out procedures.
- Scheduled calls, texts, or radio checks.
- A reliable phone or radio.
- Emergency numbers and building contacts.
- Access to exits and safe areas.
- Good lighting around entrances, parking areas, dumpsters, and loading areas.
- Tasks that workers should never do alone.
- Training on what to do if an occupant, visitor, or trespasser becomes threatening.



"Call if you need anything" is not a lone-worker procedure. Decide who checks on the worker, how often, and what happens if the worker does not respond.

Protect workers from heat

Custodians may work in gyms, attics, mechanical rooms, loading areas, parking lots, or around dumpsters. Major summer cleaning can also put workers in hot buildings with little or no air conditioning.

Managers should:

- Identify hot work areas.
- Schedule heavy work during cooler parts of the day when possible.
- Provide cool drinking water near the work.
- Plan breaks in cooler areas.
- Reduce heavy work during extreme heat.
- Give workers time to adjust to hot work.
- Train workers and supervisors to recognize heat illness.
- Encourage workers to drink water regularly instead of waiting until they feel thirsty.

Heavy sweating, headache, dizziness, nausea, weakness, and unusual fatigue signal heat exhaustion. Rest, cool down, and drink fluids before it turns into heat stroke. Call 911 if the worker becomes confused, faints, or has a seizure.

USE SAFER METHODS FOR COMMON CLEANING TASKS

Move carts and trash safely



A well-loaded cart reduces strain on the back and shoulders.

Load heavy items low and keep frequently used supplies within easy reach. Keep loads low enough to see over. Push rather than pull when practical, and slow down at thresholds, ramps, elevator gaps, and uneven flooring.

Trash weight changes from day to day. A bag that weighed little yesterday may hold bottles, wet material, or books today.

When handling trash:

- Look for sharp objects or items poking through the bag.
- Test the weight by tilting or nudging the container.
- Never compress trash with hands or feet.
- Change bags before they get too full or heavy.
- Ask for help with heavy or awkward loads.
- Use a cart whenever possible.

When carrying bags by hand:

- Keep loads small and light.

At the dumpster:

- Roll the cart as close as possible.
- Face the opening, step in close, and lift the bag straight in.
- Never stand back, twist, and toss bags sideways.
- Avoid motions that combine a heavy load, a twist, and a reach at or above shoulder height.

Lifting and moving furniture





Before lifting, ask, "Do I need to move this by hand?" If not, always use a cart, dolly, furniture slider, lift-assist device, or another worker when practical.

Before moving furniture:

- Remove loose items.
- Clear the route.
- Check for stairs, thresholds, doors, and tight turns.

When you lift:

- Test the weight first.
- Get close to the load.
- Keep it close to your body.
- Use a stable stance.
- Bend at your hips and knees.
- Lift smoothly.
- Turn your feet instead of twisting your back.
- Avoid bulky loads that block your view.

Buckets and mopping

Water and wet mops get heavy fast. Five gallons of water weighs about 42 pounds before adding the bucket. A fully saturated wet mop can weigh about 10 pounds.

Keep the bucket lighter:

- Fill only what you need.
- Consider marking a two-thirds fill line on the bucket.
- Use a wheeled bucket when practical.
- Move the bucket close to the work instead of carrying it.
- Refill smaller amounts as needed.

If a sink is too high to fill the mop bucket easily, use a hose or transfer water instead of lifting the large bucket into the sink. *(Continued)*



Choose a mop that fits

Choose a mop head workers can move comfortably when wet.

The handle should:

- Reach between the worker's chin and eye level.
- Allow the worker to stand upright.
- Have a comfortable grip.
- Adjust when workers of different heights share it.

Lighter microfiber flat mops may reduce weight and force for some jobs compared with heavy wet string mops.

Use the mop without fighting it

- Keep elbows near your sides.
- Keep wrists as straight as practical.
- Work mainly in front of your body.
- Step with the mop instead of twisting your back.
- Alternate which hand is at the top of the handle.
- Use smooth strokes instead of long, forceful reaches.
- Move your feet as the work moves.

Use the wringer with less strain

Keep the bucket from rolling while you use the wringer. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for stabilizing it.

- Face the wringer lever.
- Keep a stable stance.
- Use your body weight to press down rather than relying only on your arms and shoulders.

A wringer should not require a wrestling match. If it takes excessive force, repair or replace it.



Empty the bucket without a heavy lift

Use a floor-level sink or drain when available.

If you empty the bucket into a floor sink:

- Roll it close.
- Use both hands.
- Take a wide, stable stance.
- Bend your knees.
- Rest the bucket edge against the floor drain or sink when possible so the it helps support the weight.

If the only sink is high on the wall, transfer the water with a smaller container instead of lifting a full mop bucket.

The safest heavy lift is the one you remove from your tasks.

Sweeping, scrubbing, and wiping

These jobs may look light, but when workers repeat the same hand, wrist, and shoulder motions regularly, injuries can occur.

- Choose a broom that lets you stand upright.
- Use a stand-up dustpan when possible.
- Keep a light grip.
- Keep wrists straight rather than bent sideways.
- Use long-handled brushes or scrapers on low surfaces.
- Let cleaning products work for the required contact time instead of adding unnecessary scrubbing force.
- Switch hands.
- Move your feet instead of over-extending your arms.

An inexpensive tool that eliminates bending or awkward reaches is a good safety investment.

For stuck-on gum or grime, use a long-handled scraper when practical instead of repeatedly bending to the floor.

High dusting, tubs, walls, and hard-to-reach areas

Do not bend halfway into a bathtub or spend long periods reaching overhead if a longer tool can bring the work closer. Use lightweight tools with telescoping handles and adjustable or bendable heads.



Adjust the tool instead of stretching the worker.

High dusting

- Wear eye protection when dust or debris could fall toward your face.
- Bend the tool head to match the position of the surface.
- Extend the handle instead of stretching your arm.
- Stand at an angle instead of directly under overhead dusting work to improve your neck and shoulder position.
- Keep elbows near your sides when possible.
- Work mainly in front of your body.
- Move your feet as you clean.
- Switch hands.
- Break up long periods of overhead work.

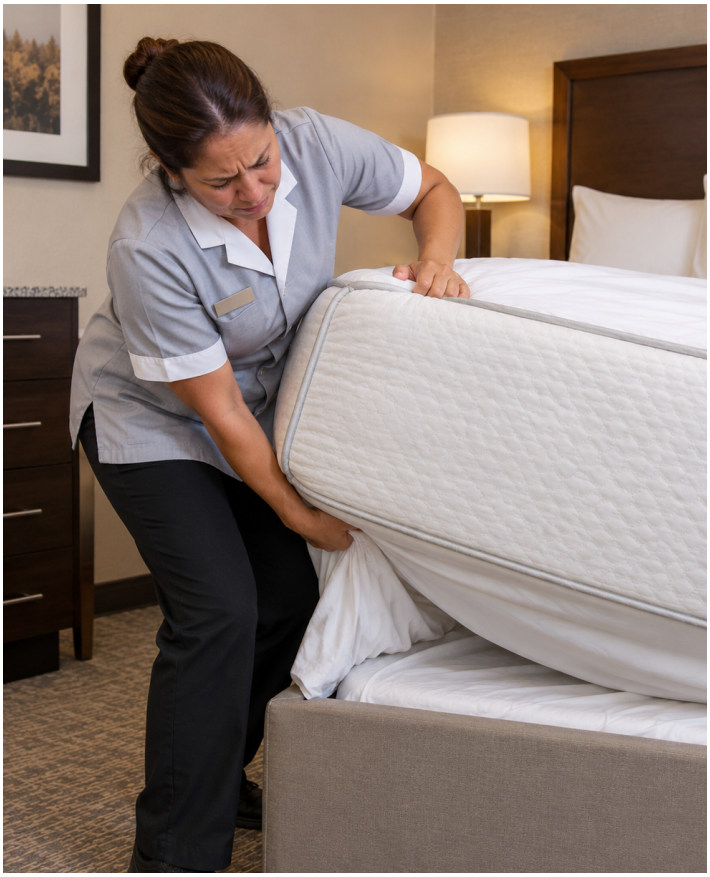
Tubs and other distant surfaces

- Stay outside the tub when possible.
- Use a long-handled scrubber.
- Move around the work instead of stretching across it.
- Keep your arms closer to your body.
- Adjust the tool to the position of the surface instead of forcing your body into an awkward position.

Bedmaking and soiled linens

Making dozens of beds during a shift can strain the back and shoulders.

- Move around the bed instead of reaching across it.
- Avoid holding a mattress up longer than necessary.



If housekeepers lift the same heavy mattress dozens of times every shift, purchasing decisions become safety decisions.



- Pull the bed away from the wall when practical.
- Raise adjustable beds to a comfortable height, then return them to the required position.

Managers should consider mattress weight and bed design when purchasing replacements.

Soiled linens can also hide sharp objects, broken glass, or body fluids. When changing bedding:

- Wear required PPE.
- Do not shake soiled linens.
- Handle the linens as little as possible.
- Do not reach blindly into piles or bags.
- Watch for bottles, broken glass, spilled liquids, needles, and other hazards in the linen.
- Use leak-resistant containers when needed.
- Use carts or wheeled hampers for collecting soiled linens.
- Place the hamper close to the bed.
- Do not overfill bags.
- Ask for help with heavy loads.

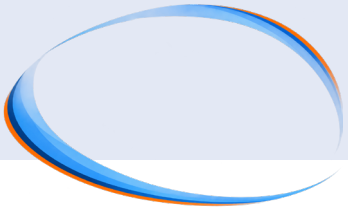
QUICK SAFETY CHECKLISTS

Workers: Check the job before you start

Ask yourself these questions before beginning a task:

- ☐ Do I know how to do this safely?
- ☐ Do I have the right tool?
- ☐ Can I adjust it to fit me?
- ☐ Is the equipment working?
- ☐ Do I need PPE?
- ☐ Can I reach the work without excessive bending or stretching?
- ☐ Is the load heavier than I expected?
- ☐ Would a cart, hose, longer handle, smaller container, or another worker help?
- ☐ Is my path clear?
- ☐ Am I working somewhere hot or alone?
- ☐ Do I know what chemical I am using?
- ☐ Do I know what to do if something goes wrong?

If you are unsure, ask before continuing.
A quick conversation can prevent an injury.



QUICK SAFETY CHECKLISTS

Supervisors: Look for changes that make the job safer

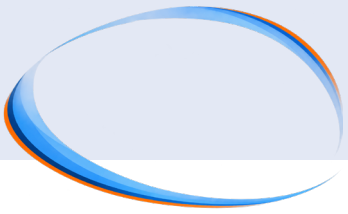
Walk through the job with the person who does it. Ask:

- ☐ Which task is hardest on your body?
- ☐ Which equipment gives you the most trouble?
- ☐ What takes more force than it should?
- ☐ Where do you bend, reach, or twist repeatedly?
- ☐ What regularly becomes too heavy?
- ☐ Which tools do not fit well?
- ☐ Which jobs get hottest?
- ☐ When do employees work alone?
- ☐ What slows the work down?
- ☐ What would make the job easier and safer?

Then do something with the answers.

Sometimes the best safety improvement is not another rule. It is a longer handle, a lighter mop, a better wheel, a fill line on a bucket, a hose at the sink, a smaller trash load, a cooler schedule, another person, a repaired machine, or more time to do the job safely.

Small changes in equipment and work methods can make a big difference.



QUICK SAFETY CHECKLISTS

Resources and references

OSHA standards:

- 29 CFR 1910.22(d)(2), Walking-working surfaces.
- 29 CFR 1910 Subpart I, Personal protective equipment.
- 29 CFR 1910.1200, Hazard communication.
- 29 CFR 1910.1030, Bloodborne pathogens.

Additional resources:

- OSHA/National Institutes of Occupational Safety and Health InfoSheet: Protecting Workers Who Use Cleaning Chemicals (English/Spanish).
- OSHA Cleaning Industry: Safety and Health Programs (English).
- California Department of Industrial Relations' Working Safer and Easier: for Janitors, Custodians, and Housekeepers (English).

DWC Workplace Safety resources:

- Back Injury Prevention Fact Sheet (English/Spanish).
- Bloodborne Pathogens Exposure Control Checklist (English/Spanish).
- Bloodborne Pathogens Safety Training Program (English/Spanish).
- Electrical Safety Fact Sheet (English/Spanish).
- Electric Shock Take 5 for Safety (English/Spanish).
- Ergonomics for General Industry-Workplace Program (English/Spanish).
- Fatal Four Safety Fact Sheet (English).
- Heat Stress Safety Training Program (English/Spanish).
- Hand Protection from Chemical Exposure Safety Training Program (English/Spanish).

Need help?

For assistance with OSHA-authorized training and free, confidential on-site consultation, visit or contact us at www.txsafetyatwork.com, SafetyTraining@tdi.texas.gov, or **800-252-7031, option 2.**

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