

A clean desk policy: why, where, and how

The benefits of implementing a clean desk policy.

It helps protect your business, your clients, and your reputation

Confidentiality is a factor in most (if not all) business activities. And everyone in an office will handle documents that contain important – and often confidential – information. That’s why all office employees need to protect documents and data from unauthorised access – both internally and from outsiders. Having a clean desk policy in place helps with this need.

A clean desk policy encourages better employee productivity and organisation

Your employees will feel more in control when they work in a well-organised environment, where everyone’s desk is clean and all areas of the office are free from paper and mess.

It provides peace-of-mind for your customers

Customers will be left with a good impression when your office space looks attractive, efficient, and professional – all thanks to your clean desk policy.

How to create your clean desk policy.

It’s important that all employees take part in and understand your business’s clean desk policy. To keep the message simple and understandable, consider promoting the three “P”s of office organisation:

PLAN the workday each morning

Encourage employees to keep only the things they need that workday on their desk. It helps to begin each day with a few minutes of planning, to organise the documents needed for immediate work. All other documents and folders can be securely filed.

PROTECT sensitive information while away from your desk

Clearly employees will need to leave their desk at times during the day, for example to attend meetings or to take their breaks. Encourage them to quickly check for sensitive information on their desk before they leave, and to move it off their desk or place it inside a folder. Using a computer’s password-protected screen saver can offer additional security.

PICK UP documents before leaving each day

Remind employees not to leave documents on their desk at day’s end, but to file them or lock them up if necessary. This helps to maintain security for both client and employee information.

And when your team get into the habit of clearing their desks every day before they leave, they’ll be naturally more productive with a neat and tidy office first thing in the morning.

How secure shredding can help your business

With secure shredding, your organisation can not only comply with legislation, but also ensure that confidential business, client, and employee information is always kept secure.



Steps to implementing your clean desk policy.

Communicate the policy in writing

It's very important to convey to all team members how to follow the clean desk policy, and why it matters. At this stage, it's a good idea to indicate what the consequences will be for non-compliance with the policy – especially if your team are dealing with highly sensitive information.

Get management buy-in

So that your clean desk policy is taken seriously by everyone, make sure you get agreement from your senior management team to both follow and advocate the policy. After all, if managers don't follow the policy, why would the rest of your team?

Use email signatures to remind staff

Consider adding a reminder about your clean desk policy to your organisation's standardised email signature. This can be something simple like: "Please think of the environment before you print this email. Not only will this cut our paper use, waste and untidiness, it will also reduce expense and help to protect our sensitive information."

Provide employees with lockable storage

A clean desk policy is impossible to implement without providing your team with somewhere to temporarily store their sensitive documents. Small, lockable storage boxes that can fit under desks are ideal for employees to use for confidential information.

Promote electronic documents instead of paper

Almost every office suffers from lots of unnecessary printing. By encouraging employees to work with more electronic documents, you can aim for less paper clutter and cleaner desks for everyone.

Put in place a routine backup system

When moving towards a paperless office, it's important to make sure your organisation has a dependable backup system and routine in place. That way, everyone's documents will be safe in the event that power goes down or hard drives crash.

Remember: It's crucial that employees do not mistakenly dispose of sensitive documents in an unsecure waste bin. The safest (and most environmentally friendly!) way to ensure that sensitive information is protected is to place all unneeded documents in the secure console before employees leave each day.

Ways to administer your clean desk policy.

Place reminders around the office

Signs in key areas of the office, or reminder cards on desks, can help employees remember to follow the new policy. Remind team members of the importance of tidying their desks at the end of each day.

Nominate 'clean desk leaders' to monitor your office

If it's not enforced, your clean desk policy can quickly be ignored and become useless. Nominate a manager from each department, or allocate your operations or office manager, to check everyone's desk each day and make sure your new policy is being followed. There should be no papers, notes, Post-its or any other documents containing sensitive information left on desks.

Once all the team get into the routine, you may be able to scale back from daily checks to random checks, depending on your type of business and the information you handle.

Remind those who don't follow the policy

Particularly in the early days, there will always be some employees who forget to adhere to your new policy. For these team members, a desk card or door hanger can remind them when they've left sensitive documents on their desk.

You can also introduce a "three strike" policy, where employees who regularly fail to follow the policy face documented consequences (we'll leave you to determine what that looks like!)

Acknowledge and reward your clean desk champions

Consider thanking your entire team for maintaining the policy by shouting an office lunch for all.

Another fun idea to launch your clean desk policy is to create a contest between departments, to see who meets the policy best. Competing for an award is a great way to encourage buy-in and kick off your new clean desk policy with enthusiasm!

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