

## Clean Up - Office Slob Hurts Morale, Productivity

By Holly Culhane, Contributing Columnist



Spring is turning to summer and for many people, that means it's time to let fresh air in and clean up the office. The winter clutter is falling from desktops. The recycling bins would qualify for an intervention on the "Hoarders" television documentary. And weird green stuff is growing in coffee cups.

It may be fun to joke about the office slob. But clutter – and that's a nice word for the garbage that fills some offices – is a serious problem.

A nationwide office supply company teamed up with the National Association of Professional Organizers in 2006 to conduct a study to assess the problem. Ninety-one percent of the respondents said they could be more efficient at work if they were better organized. In a related study, Price Waterhouse Cooper estimated that workers spend nearly 50 percent of their time looking for information because it's not properly organized.

Earlier studies found executives waste six weeks a year searching for lost items and information. And according to the Small Business Administration, because of improperly handled paperwork, many small businesses are prevented from properly servicing customers, increasing sales and improving their bottom lines.

In March, Forbes magazine reported on a survey by staffing consultant Adecco that found 57 percent of Americans admit they judge coworkers by how clean or dirty they keep their work spaces. Respondents blamed messy workplaces on sheer laziness.

That impression can also impact job performance evaluations and promotion opportunities. People whose desks and work spaces are disorganized run the risk of being judged incompetent.

And while the impact on individuals and their productivity should be of concern, consider the message a messy work place sends to customers. Would you trust a company whose office appears to be in chaos with sensitive information, or entrust it with your hard earned cash? Probably not.

We recently did "spring cleaning" at P.A.S. Associates' Bakersfield office. Here are some of the steps we took:

- Schedule a clean-up day, with everyone pitching in. Have employees make a checklist and maintain a regular clean-up schedule.
- Organize your desk at the end of every day. Make sure at least 80 percent of the desktop is visible.
- Eliminate anything from the desktop that is not used often.
- Keep only urgent or working files on the desk top. Put the other files in drawers or cabinets.
- Don't print e-mails just to read them. Use your computer as an organizer and for storage.
- Don't stack paperwork or personal items on the floor.

- Dust and disinfect regularly.
- Adopt a flexible, but enforceable “clean desk policy.” Have staff help develop the policy, which sets reasonable limits and offers rewards, as well as punishments.
- Develop and post policies about how recyclables will be collected and removed.

Getting organized and staying that way is worth the investment of time and money. Worker morale and productivity improve, as does a company’s efficiency.

***This article written by Holly Culhane first appeared online and in The Bakersfield Californian on Friday, June 15, 2012. Holly Culhane is president of the Bakersfield-based human resources consulting firm P.A.S. Associates. She can be contacted through her website [www.pasassociates.com](http://www.pasassociates.com) and through the [PAS Facebook](#) page or by phone at 631-2165.***

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