

Spring Cleaning Your File Cabinet



Spring cleaning isn't just for home -- and it isn't just for spring, either! Your home or office filing system needs an occasional deep-clean, just like your kitchen cabinets and closets. So let's get to the spring cleaning!

Clear Out the Clutter

Your filing system is a lot like your junk drawer. Every time you find something that you think might be useful, you stick it in the drawer. Some of those things have come in handy later on and others just take up space. But every once in a while, you have to clear the decks and start fresh with your storage. This is why office spring cleaning is so important.

To start spring cleaning your office, empty every folder out of your file drawer and start by asking yourself if that category is still meaningful and relevant to your life. Completed projects, old client files, and obsolete reference topics may be able to go away. You can then sort through each "keeper" folder and clean out unnecessary and outdated paperwork. Remember that this is spring cleaning! Only current and relevant documents should reside in your active files. If you don't use it all the time but may possibly need to refer to that information again in the future, place the item in your archive files. If not, and there is no legal reason for you to keep it, toss or shred. Phew! Step 1 of your office spring cleaning is done.

A New Coat of Paint

While you've got your file system emptied, take a minute to look at your supplies and see if they pass muster. Are your folders getting old and raggedy? Take a second to replace them with new, clean files. Are your labels a mess? Too many cross-outs and write-overs make it hard to find the folder you need. Get some fresh labels and neatly type or print the correct title for each file. Are your filing cabinets dysfunctional, with dented and hard-to-open drawers? If you have to fight with your cabinet every time you need a document, it's time to consider a replacement. Your spring cleaning project provides the perfect opportunity to start fresh with fully functioning equipment.

Also examine your naming convention and make sure that your files are labeled in a way that makes sense. The



goal is to start each file with the name of the larger category to which it belongs (ex: utilities), then add on the descriptor that lets you know exactly what paperwork that folder contains (ex: utilities:water or utilities:electric). The key is moving from general to more specific. Color-coding your files and/or labels is another great way to distinguish categories of files from one another.

Put It All Back In Order

Finally, it's time to get each document back in its home. Once you have all of your file folders labeled and placed in the drawer, look around and see if there are any loose piles of paper sitting out -- on a desk, shelf, or credenza. Go through each stack and clear out any junk (following the guidelines in step 1 above), then file those papers in your existing categories. By the time you are done, every piece of paper in your office should have a home and be easy to locate whenever you need it.

If you missed office spring cleaning this year, don't worry -- you can clean up your paper management act any time you need to. Don't put it off until next spring!

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