

Slips, Trips and Falls

Introduction

Slips and trips are the single-largest cause of accidents in both public areas and workplaces. They consistently account for around 1 in 3 non-fatal major injuries, and for over 1 in 5 over-3-day injuries in workplace areas throughout Great Britain; a total of at least 35,000 injuries per annum. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) statistics suggest that the majority of these accidents are slips, most of which occur when floor surfaces are contaminated (e.g. with water, grease, talc etc.)¹. Best estimates currently put the average slip claim in the UK at approximately £7,000.

All employers should assess the risk of slips and trips in the workplace, to ensure the safety of employees, visitors, contractors etc. Similarly, anyone who is in control of premises needs to manage the risks of slipping and tripping.

Assessing the risks of slips, trips and falls

A risk assessment helps you understand what sensible precautions are required to control the hazards in your workplace, for example:

- Specifying an appropriate type of flooring for the environment, usage and footfall.
- Implementing an effective cleaning regime and inspection system.
- Having procedures for attending to spillages and contamination.
- Implementing procedures for inclement weather.
- Using doormats to stop rain water being tracked-in and making the floor slippery.

You are probably already doing some of these things to protect your employees and visitors, but a risk assessment will highlight areas where further action is necessary.

The risk assessment process might include a 'heat map'; plotting all slips, trips and falls incidents by location to identify areas of highest footfall and high risk areas such as wet leisure areas, changing rooms, poolside, station platforms and outside spaces.

Some of the key hazards you might consider are:

- Uneven steps or steps that are not uniform in dimension.
- Poor lighting.
- Changes in level.
- Slopes.
- Unsuitable flooring.
- Inappropriate footwear.
- Trailing pipes and cables.
- Damaged floor surfaces (both internal and external).
- Poor housekeeping.
- Vulnerable users.

As few workplaces stay the same, it is essential to review what you are doing on an on-going basis.

Practical steps to prevent slips and trips accidents

There are many simple ways to control slips and trips risks and prevent accidents in your workplace. Here are a few examples:

Stop floors becoming contaminated

Use entrance matting.

Fix leaks from machinery or buildings.

Make sure plant and equipment are maintained.

Design tasks to minimise spillages.

Plan pedestrian and vehicle routes to avoid contaminated areas.

Use the right cleaning methods

Make sure that your cleaning method is effective for the type of floor you have.
Don't introduce more slip or trip risks while cleaning is being undertaken.
Leave smooth floors dry after cleaning or exclude pedestrians until the floor is dry.
Remove spillages promptly.
Have effective arrangements for both routine cleaning and dealing with spills.
Use the appropriate detergent mixed at the correct concentration.

Consider the flooring and work environment

Check for loose, damaged and worn flooring and replace as needed.
Floors likely to get wet or have spillages on them should be of a type that does not become unduly slippery.
Make sure lighting is sufficient and that slopes or steps are clearly visible.
Keep walkways and work areas clear of obstructions.

Get the right footwear

Where floors cannot be kept clean and dry, slip-resistant footwear can help prevent slip accidents.
Trial footwear first to make sure it is suitable for the environment and for those who will be wearing it, i.e. comfort and fit.
If footwear is supplied as personal protective equipment (PPE), it must be supplied free of charge to employees.

Think about people and organisational factors

Consider how work is organised and managed, e.g. to avoid rushing, overcrowding and trailing cables.
Make sure employees are involved in the decisions that affect them, e.g. choice of PPE footwear or a change in cleaning methods.

Make sure the surface is appropriate to the environment and expected use

New Surfaces:

Flooring is given R ratings (R9-R13, where R9 is slippery when wet, and R13 the least slippery) and these can be confusing. The best information on flooring is given in the Pendulum Test Values (PTV), and in particular the PTV in relation to wet and/or contaminated floors. This test is designed to replicate a pedestrian heel strike, the point at which most slips occur. If these are not supplied then you should ask for them:

- Specify non-slip surfaces and ensure that these have a minimum of 36 PTV when wet or contaminated. The figure rises to 38 when slopes are present.
- Ensure the design is free from trip hazards.

Existing Surfaces:

Some existing floors may be unsuitable and not reach the 36 PTV. There are treatments and work that can be carried out to improve the slip resistance. PTV can be carried out on flooring and action plans put together. Other key points include:

- Ensuring that surfaces are kept in good order.
- Promptly repairing damage.
- Securing coverings such as mats, rugs and carpets.

Housekeeping

The HSE estimates that 50% of all trip hazards result from poor housekeeping. Good housekeeping is the most important method of preventing slips, trips and falls. Examples of good housekeeping include:

- Cleaning all spills immediately.
- Marking spills and wet areas with appropriate signage.
- Mopping spillages or sweeping debris from floors.
- Removing obstacles from walkways and always keeping them free of clutter.
- Covering cables that cross walkways.
- Keeping walkways well lit.
- Promptly replacing broken/defective light bulbs and faulty switches.

Without good housekeeping practices, any other preventive measures such as installation of sophisticated flooring, specialty footwear or even training on techniques of walking and safe falling will never be fully effective.

Records

The keeping of records, of the specification of flooring, the risk assessment, flooring inspections and maintenance, and perhaps most importantly of cleaning procedures may prove decisive in defending compensation claims.

The magic "inch"

Organisations often enquire about the extent to which they might be held liable for an accident which results from a trip on an uneven surface. What is the "height" below which a change in level, hole or depression will not render them liable? There is no "safe" limit, no hard and fast rule for when a defect could become a claim. Every claim for compensation will be decided on its own merits and the circumstances that relate to it.

For example, a flooring defect of 1 inch may not generate liability if it occurred just prior to the accident and there was no possibility of the property owner detecting it and taking corrective action in time to prevent the fall. However, a small tripping hazard of lesser size may result in a liability if it had been present for an extended period, if its existence was known and it was in a location where people walked regularly.

Key action steps

If you have a responsibility for premises:

- **New Surfaces:** Ensure that new flooring surfaces are free from tripping and slipping hazards.
- **Housekeeping:** Implement a housekeeping programme.
- **Inspections:** Conduct routine inspections to ensure surfaces are free from hazards.
- **Maintenance:** Ensure that routine maintenance is carried out to remedy defects.
- **Spills:** Ensure that spills are identified/reported and cleaned up immediately.

Case studies

There is a wealth of case law, both civil and criminal, relating to trip claims, the following are representative examples. The HSE website contains many case studies illustrating both good and bad practice:

- Hays vs. ASDA Stores: Customer tripped on projecting fitment in white goods display area. Defendant retailer able to prove that there had been only 3 incidents over a 5-year period and that annual "footfall" for the store was circa 1.4 million. Claimant lost.
- Harvey vs. Woolworths (2004): Customer slipped on wet floor when entering the store. Defendant retailer able to demonstrate effective system of cleaning, use of warning signs and absorbent mats.
- A sunken paving slab in an unlit alleyway resulted in a passer-by falling and fracturing their hip. They received £7,500 in compensation.
- Convenience store prosecuted following incident in which a customer tripped on plastic binding used to hold newspapers in bundles. Fine £4,500.
- Carpet retailer: Found to have poor floor coverings during routine safety inspection. Fined £8,000 for this and other offences.

Checklist

A generic Slips, Trips and Falls Checklist is presented on the following pages which can be tailored to your own organisation.

Acknowledgements and References

¹ HSE – "Assessing the slip resistance of flooring, a technical information sheet"

More information on the above can be found on the HSEs website: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/>

Further risk management information can be obtained from Aviva at:

<http://www.aviva.co.uk/risksolutions/help/faq/>

Please Note

this document contains general information and guidance and is not and should not be relied on as specific advice. The document may not cover every risk, exposure or hazard that may arise and Aviva recommend that you obtain specific advice relevant to the circumstances. AVIVA accepts no responsibility or liability towards any person who may rely upon this document.

Slips, Trips and Falls Checklist

Location(s)	
Date	
Completed by (name and signature)	

	External	Y/N	Comments
1.	Is there enough lighting around the workplace for employees and visitors to be able to see and avoid hazards that might be on the ground?		
2.	Are regular, documented inspections undertaken to identify potential hazards, ensuring that any remedial work identified is implemented?		
3.	Are materials used for external paved areas slip-resistant when wet, adequately cleaned and maintained, to ensure they remain that way?		
4.	Do you discourage individuals from taking shortcuts over grass or dirt which are likely to become slippery when wet?		
5.	Have you considered fitting canopies over building entrances to reduce the amount of water walked-into the building?		
6.	If a canopy isn't a possibility, have you considered installing absorbent mats (which are securely fixed) to keep floors clean and dry?		
7.	Is entrance flooring non-slip and is a cleaning regime in place to keep it that way?		
8.	Do you have a procedure for keeping up to date with the weather forecast, and are you able to respond to the forecast?		
9.	Do you have procedures to prevent any icy surfaces forming, or keeping pedestrians away from slippery surfaces?		
10.	Do you use salt and grit to remove snow and ice on paths and car parks?		

Loss Prevention Standards



	Internal	Y/N	Comments
11.	Are regular, documented inspections undertaken to identify potential hazards, ensuring that any remedial work identified is implemented?		
12.	Are entrances, aisles and corridors free from obstructions, having satisfactory lighting?		
13.	Are there any areas with variations in floor level (e.g. slopes, small steps), or changes from one floor material to another?		
14.	Are all floor surfaces in good condition?		
15.	Are stairs in good condition, free from obstruction and provided with handrails and adequate lighting?		
16.	Are there any trip hazards around workstations (e.g. trailing cables or boxes), and has office furniture been arranged so as not to hinder walkways?		
17.	Are documented cleaning schedules in place to ensure surfaces are kept clean and dry?		
18.	Are procedures in place to immediately clean up any spillages?		
	General	Y/N	Comments
19.	Have the results of the slips, trips and falls risk assessment been communicated to all relevant individuals?		
20.	Has the provision of appropriate slip-resistant footwear been considered as part of the relevant risk assessment?		
21.	Are employees encouraged to report any issues which they consider to be unsafe?		
22.	Additional comments:		