

Preventing slips and trips at work



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Over a third of all major injuries reported each year are caused as a result of a slip or trip (**the single most common cause of injuries at work**). These cost employers over £512 million a year in lost production and other costs. Slips and trips also account for over half of all reported injuries to members of the public.

Recognising the importance of slips and trips, the Health and Safety Executive and local authorities have included this topic in their programmes of work designed to achieve national targets set to improve health and safety performance. These targets were published by the Government and the Health and Safety Commission in the Revitalising Health and Safety strategy statement of June 2000.

Legal actions brought as a result of an injury can be extremely damaging to business, especially where the public are involved. Insurance covers only a small proportion of the costs.

Anyone at work, but particularly employers, can help to reduce slip and trip hazards through good health and safety arrangements.

Effective solutions are often simple, cheap and lead to other benefits.

Managing health and safety

A good management system will help you to identify problem areas, decide what to do, act on decisions made and check that the steps taken have been effective.

A good system should involve:

Planning Identify key areas of risk and set goals for improvement. Employers can work with employees to identify areas on site that they think are a slipping and tripping risk (remember that there will be about 40 cases of a slip or stumble, resulting in no or minor injury for every major injury accident). Careful selection of materials, equipment and work practices can prevent or contain slip and trip hazards from liquids, fine powders and objects. For example fit splash guards and anti-slip floorings in areas that can't be kept dry and use cordless tools to avoid trailing cables across working areas. This all helps to remove or minimise risks.

Organisation Workers need to be involved and committed to reducing risks. Give people (eg supervisors) responsibilities to ensure that areas of the workplace are kept safe, eg getting spillages and objects cleaned up quickly, keeping access routes clear and ensuring lighting is maintained. Keep a record of who is responsible for which arrangements; take special care to include cleaning and other contractors. Make these details clear to everyone.

Control Check to ensure that working practices and processes are being carried out properly, eg smooth floors are not left wet, housekeeping is good, and any leaks from equipment and roof lights are repaired quickly. Keep a record of cleaning and maintenance work etc and encourage good health and safety.

Monitor and review Monitor accident investigation and inspection reports. Try to identify any deficiencies in your management arrangements. Do they show any improvement? Talk to any safety representatives about slip and trip risks – they can be a great help when identifying and solving problems. Employees should also be encouraged to be involved in reviewing existing control measures. They are often better placed to assess the effectiveness of the measures implemented to reduce the risks of slipping and tripping.

Examine slip and trip risks

All employers have to assess the risks to employees and others who may be affected by their work, eg visitors and members of the public. This helps to find out what needs to be done to control the risk. It is also needed to satisfy the law.

HSE recommend a five-step approach to risk assessment, and slip and trip risks should be among the risks examined.

Step 1 Look for slip and trip hazards around the workplace, such as uneven floors, trailing cables, areas that are sometimes slippery due to spillages. Include outdoor areas.

Step 2 Decide who might be harmed and how. Who comes into the workplace? Are they at risk? Do you have any control over them? Remember that older people and people with disabilities may be at particular risk.

Step 3 Consider the risks. Are the precautions already taken adequate to deal with the risks?

Step 4 Record your findings if you have five or more employees.

Step 5 Regularly review the assessment. If any significant changes take place, make sure existing precautions and management arrangements are still adequate to deal with the risks.

What the law says

The **Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSWA)** requires employers to ensure the health and safety of all employees and anyone who may be affected by their work. This includes taking steps to control slip and trip risks.

Employees must not endanger themselves or others and must use any safety equipment provided.

Manufacturers and suppliers have a duty to ensure that their products are safe. They must also provide adequate information about appropriate use.

The **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999** build on HSWA and include duties on employers to assess risks (including slip and trip risks) and where necessary take action to safeguard health and safety.

The **Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992** require floors to be suitable, in good condition and free from obstructions. People must be able to move around safely.

Good working practice

Get conditions right from the start - this will make dealing with slip and trip risks easier. Choose only suitable floor surfaces and particularly avoid very smooth floors in areas that will become wet/contaminated (such as kitchens and entrance halls). Ensure lighting levels are sufficient, properly plan pedestrian and traffic routes and avoid overcrowding.

Cleaning and maintenance

Train workers in the correct use of any safety and cleaning equipment provided.

Cleaning methods and equipment must be suitable for the type of surface being treated. You may need to get advice from the manufacturer or supplier. Take care not to create additional slip or trip hazards while cleaning and maintenance work is being done.

Carry out all necessary maintenance work promptly (you may need to get outside help or guidance). Include inspection, testing, adjustment and cleaning at suitable intervals. Keep records so that the system can be checked.

Lighting should enable people to see obstructions, potentially slippery areas etc, so they can work safely. Replace, repair or clean lights before levels become too low for safe work.

Floors need to be checked for loose finishes, holes and cracks, worn rugs and mats etc. Take care in the choice of floor if it is likely to become wet or dusty due to work processes. Seek specialist advice when choosing a floor for difficult conditions.

Obstructions and objects left lying around can easily go unnoticed and cause a trip. Try to keep work areas tidy and if obstructions can't be removed, warn people using signs or barriers. Cardboard should not be used to absorb spillages as this itself presents a tripping hazard.

Footwear can play an important part in preventing slips and trips. This is especially important where floors can't be kept dry. Your footwear supplier should be able to advise on shoes/boots with slip-resistant soles. Employers need to provide footwear, if it is necessary to protect the workers' safety.

There are many simple steps you can take to reduce risks. You will find a few examples below.

<i>Hazard</i>	<i>Suggested action</i>
Spillage of wet and dry substances	Clean spills up immediately, if a liquid is greasy, make sure a suitable cleaning agent is used. After cleaning the floor can be wet for some time; dry it where possible. Use appropriate barriers to tell people the floor is still wet and arrange alternative bypass routes. If cleaning is done once a day, it may be possible to do it last thing at night, so it is dry for the start of the next shift.
Trailing cables	Position equipment to avoid cables crossing pedestrian routes, use cable covers to securely fix to surfaces, restrict access to prevent contact. Consider use of cordless tools. Remember that contractors will also need to be managed.
Miscellaneous rubbish, eg plastic bags	Keep areas clear, remove rubbish and do not allow it to build up.
Rugs/mats	Ensure mats are securely fixed and do not have curling edges.
Poor lighting	Improve lighting levels and placement of light fittings to ensure more even lighting of all floor areas.
Slippery surfaces	Assess the cause and treat accordingly, for example always keep them dry if wet causes the problem. In certain situations you may have to treat them chemically and use appropriate cleaning method etc.
Change from wet to dry floor surface	Provide suitable footwear, warn of risks by using signs, locate doormats where these changes are likely.
Changes of level	Try to avoid. If you can't, improve lighting, add high visible tread nosings (ie white/reflective edge to step).
Slopes	Improve visibility, provide hand rails, use floor markings.
Smoke/steam obscuring view	Eliminate or control by redirecting it away from risk areas; improve ventilation and warn of it.
Unsuitable footwear	Ensure workers choose suitable footwear, particularly with the correct type of sole. If the type of work requires special protective footwear, the employer is required by law to provide it free of charge.

Further advice

Further advice is available in the following HSE publications.

Slips and trips: Guidance for employers on identifying hazards and controlling risks
HSG155 HSE Books 1996 ISBN 0 7176 1145 0

Slips and trips: Guidance for the food processing industry HSG156 HSE Books
1996 ISBN 0 7176 0832 8

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write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

Information can also be found on the HSE slips and trips website
www.hse.gov.uk/slips/index.htm

This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which
you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

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