

# Slips and Trips in the Workplace

## Background

Slips and trips and trips are the most common cause of major injuries in the workplace. According to HSE statistics in 2010/11 slips, trips and falls made up more than half of all reported major injuries and almost a third of over three day injuries to employees. Around one quarter (24%) of all fatal injuries involved a slip, trip or fall.

The number of injuries could be severely reduced if employers and those in control of premises obtained a greater understanding of the causes of slips and trips in the workplace, conducted a suitable risk assessment to identify the risks and implemented the necessary actions to manage the risks identified.

## Legislation

- Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 employers have to ensure their employees and anyone else who could be affected by their work (such as visitors, members of the public, patients etc.), are kept safe from harm and that their health is not affected. Inevitably this means slip and trips risks must be controlled to ensure people do not slip, trip and fall.
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 build on the Health and Safety at Work Act and place 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 for the workplace and work activity, kept in good condition and kept free from obstructions. Also, people must be able to move around safely.

## Where to start: risk assessment

Employers have a duty to undertake a risk assessment in order to identify any possible slip and trip hazards. The HSE recommend the following five step approach to risk assessment.

### Step 1

Look for trip and slip hazards around the workplace such as uneven floors, trailing cables, areas that are sometimes slippery due to spillages. Both indoor and outdoor areas should be considered.

### Step 2

Decide who might be harmed and how. Consider who comes into the workplace, the risks they may be exposed to and the degree of control you have over the people involved. Particular consideration should be given to older people and people with disabilities.

### Step 3

Consider the risks. Consideration should be given as to whether the precautions taken are adequate to deal with the risk.

### Step 4

Record the findings.

### Step 5

Review on a regular basis. The situation should be reviewed on a regular basis to make sure adequate precautions are in place to deal with the risks.

## Avoiding slips and trips

The following factors should be considered when trying to identify and reduce the risks presented within the workplace.

## Suitability of flooring

- Consideration should be given to the suitability of the flooring for the purpose of use. Slip resistant flooring may be required in some areas particularly those areas where the flooring may become wet.
- Floor should be correctly fitted to ensure there are no uneven surfaces and that non-stick coatings are correctly applied.
- Changes in level should be avoided/highlighted
- Stairs should have high visibility, non slip edgings; a suitable handrail installed and be of equal height and width.

## Cleaning and maintenance

- Flooring should be correctly maintained to ensure there are no trip hazards such as uneven surface, holes or curled up edges.
- Suitable cleaning materials should be used to ensure that the flooring does not become slippery and where appropriate keeps its slip resistant properties.
- Wet flooring due to mopping and trailing vacuum cleaning wires can present a slip hazard. Pedestrian access should be restricted whilst cleaning is in progress.

## Contaminated flooring

Flooring which is contaminated due to spillages of water, oil, grease etc. is often a major cause of slips and trips in the workplace. Consideration should be given to any measures which will either eliminate or reduce the contamination eg. entrance mats, drip trays for leaks. If the contamination cannot be eliminated a cleaning programme needs to be put into place to deal with the problem quickly and effectively.

## Obstacles

A large number of trip accidents can be avoided by ensuring there are no dangerous obstacles in the path of workers.

Obstacles can be avoided by:

- Ensuring there is a suitable walkway through the workplace.
- Keeping the area clear of trailing wires and other obstacles.
- Keep workstations and the floors around them tidy by providing sufficient storage space.

## Environmental issues

Environmental issues can contribute to the risk of slips and trips:

- Too much light on a shiny floor can reflect and cause glare reducing people's ability to observe hazards on the floor.
- Poor lighting also reduces the ability to see hazards on floors and stairs.
- High noise levels can be distracting.
- Rainwater entering a building or condensation can make a smooth flooring surface slippery.
- Ice and frost formed during cold spells may make outdoor areas slippery - gritting.

## People

It is important that a responsible attitude towards health and safety is cultivated within the workplace:

- Encourage employees to deal with their own spillages and not wait for someone else to clean it up.
- Discourage rushing around, carrying large objects or walking whilst using a mobile phone.
- Encourage the wearing of suitable footwear – lower heels and where appropriate slip resistant soles.

More information on slips and trips can be found on the HSE website: [www.hse.gov.uk/slips/](http://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/)