



ACCIDENTS IN THE WORKPLACE

Every year thousands of people are injured by slipping, tripping or falling and many are left with painful lifelong injuries. These accidents are preventable and everybody has a role to play. Slips, trips and falls account for about 15% of all accidents in the workplace and are the second highest cause of accidents.

Slips, trips and falls on the same level are the most common cause of injuries at work. They occur in almost all workplaces and 95% of major slips result in broken bones.

These accidents are preventable and everybody has a role to play!

This short article is an introduction to the subject and more technical data can be obtained from the Health & Safety Authority website. Additional information and training tools are available on the Health & Safety Executive site in UK, including watch your STEP (The Slips and Trips eLearning Package) this is suitable for a wide range of industries and specific learning packages are available for Food Manufacturing, Hospitality and Catering, Education and Health and Social Care sectors.

KEY MESSAGES ABOUT SLIPS AND TRIPS

- Slips and trips are serious
- Simple and minimal cost effective measures can reduce these accidents
- Statically slips, trips and falls account for 2 fatalities per year
- 67% of all personal injuries in a public place
- 33% of all reported major injuries
- 20% of over 3 days lost time injuries to employees

Nature of the Hazards

Slip hazards can be found on both wet and dry surfaces.

Slips are caused by the presence of substances such as water, grease, oil, fats, soaps, granules, plastic sheets, packaging, leaves, ice etc deposited on the floor arising from the working conditions or in some cases the weather.

Main causes of injury from a slip, trip or fall

The main causes of injury from a slip, trip or fall are:

- Walking over uneven ground, particularly when carrying large and/or awkward objects
- Tripping over materials not stacked correctly or waste materials carelessly disregarded

- Tripping over trailing cables
- Slipping caused by wet, gritty or icy surfaces
- Falling over due to soft and poor ground conditions
- Trips caused by small or sudden changes in level
- Curled up or worn carpets
- Rugs and mats on polished floors
- Uneven floor surfaces and steps
- Slipping in baths, showers etc
- Inappropriate footwear

The hazards listed above are so ordinary and commonplace that people often accept them as part of normal living until they or someone close to them has an accident and is seriously hurt.

Employers must ensure that where possible the hazard is eliminated or at a minimum controls to reduce the risk for slips, trips and falls are maintained.

Hazard Identified: Slips

Examples of how slips may occur include:

- Wet floor surfaces
- Ice forming outside work premises
- Fats, oils and other contaminants on floor surfaces
- Rugs and mats on polished floors and slipping on poorly secured carpets
- Slipping in baths, showers etc.
- Inappropriate footwear

Examples of control measures:

- In the first instance, floor surfaces with good grip should be laid where possible but should also be able to be hygienically cleaned
- The risk of any contaminants that may be spilled onto the floor should be eliminated where possible
- Leaking pipes etc., should be fixed and adequately maintained
- Contaminants should be cleaned off the floor immediately. Where they cannot be removed immediately, safety signs should be placed on the floor to warn persons of the slipping hazard
- Those persons who clean the floors must be informed and trained to know what cleaning products they can safely use on the various floor surfaces
- Procedures should be in place to grit and salt outside areas of the workplace to reduce the risk of persons and vehicles slipping on ice or compacted snow
- Measures should be taken to stop ice forming on the floors of freezer/refrigeration units

- Floors should have effective drainage in wet areas
- Pedestrian walkways should be kept clear of any materials and be kept separate from workstations
- Steps and steep slopes should be clearly marked and handrails provided
- Safety signs should be placed in bathrooms/shower rooms to warn of slipping hazards within these areas. Staff should supervise elderly care home residents when in bathrooms/shower rooms
- Leather soled shoes or very high heels should be avoided in many workplaces; appropriate footwear for the work conditions should be worn instead
- All workers must receive suitable and sufficient information, instruction and training in all of the above control measures

Hazard Identified: Trips

Examples of how trips may occur include:

- Cables, hosepipes, ropes, etc., left across walkways
- Uneven, loose floor surfaces
- Small items left on the floor/accumulation of rubbish
- Poor lighting (including dazzling lighting and strobe lighting etc)
- Low barriers
- Loose mats, rugs and carpets
- Inappropriate footwear

Examples of control measures:

- Floors should be in good condition and regularly maintained
- Uneven and loose flooring should be repaired immediately
- Those objects that cannot be removed from floors should be secured in place by sticking them firmly to the floor and warning persons by using appropriate safety signs
- Cables, hosepipes and similar objects lying on floor surfaces should be removed where possible
- Waste materials should not be allowed to accumulate; they should be removed on a daily basis
- Low lighting levels and glare from lighting can cause persons to trip and injure themselves. Those persons entering these situations must be warned about any tripping hazards they may encounter because of the lighting used, e.g. in cinemas and nightclubs

Example: Corridor Wide Hazards: Slips/Trips/Falls



Potential Hazard:-

Employee exposure to wet floors or spills and clutter that can lead to slips/trips/falls and other possible injuries.

Possible Solutions and Good Work Practices

Keep floors clean and dry.

In addition to being a slip hazard, continually wet surfaces promote the growth of mould, fungi and bacteria that can cause infections

Provide warning signs for wet floors.

Where wet processes are used, maintain drainage and provide false floors, platforms, mats or other dry standing places where practicable, or provide appropriate waterproof footwear.

Keep aisles and passageways clear and in good repair, with no obstructions across or in aisles that could create a hazard.

Provide floor plugs for equipment so that power cords do not run across pathways.

Ensure spills are reported and cleaned up immediately.

Use no-skid waxes and surfaces coated with grit to create non-slip surfaces in slippery areas such as toilet and shower areas.

Use waterproof footwear to decrease slip/fall hazards.

Use only properly maintained ladders to reach items.
Do not use stools, chairs, or boxes as substitutes for ladders.

Re-lay or stretch carpets that bulge or have become bunched to prevent tripping hazards.

Aisles and passageways should be sufficiently wide for easy movement and should be kept clear at all times.

Temporary electrical cords that cross aisles should be taped or anchored to the floor.
Eliminate cluttered or obstructed work areas.

Use prudent housekeeping procedures such as cleaning only one side of a passageway at a time, and provide good lighting for all halls and stairwells, to help reduce accidents.

Provide adequate lighting especially during night hours.

Instruct workers to use the handrail on stairs, to avoid undue speed, and to maintain an unobstructed view of the stairs ahead of them even if that means requesting help to manage a bulky load.

Eliminate uneven floor surfaces.

Promote safe work in cramped working spaces.
Avoid awkward positions, and use equipment that makes lifts less awkward.