

Top Tips for Trips (Public Liability)

Introduction

Slips and falls are not a trivial problem and are one of the most common causes of non-fatal major injuries to employees in the manufacturing and service sectors. They also account for over half of all reported accidents to members of the public.

Anyone who is in control of premises regularly visited by members of the public e.g. retail establishments or leisure facilities needs to manage the risks of slipping and tripping. Similarly, property owners have responsibilities in respect of the common parts of offices or blocks of residential accommodation.

Slips and trips can result in serious injuries and may lead to large compensation awards. Effective solutions are often simple, cheap and easy to implement.

Slips and trips have been made one of the "priority areas" in the HSE's Revitalising Health and Safety programme.

Legislation

All employers have responsibilities to ensure the safety of their employees, and those not in their employment, under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 describes the duty to conduct a risk assessment and the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 set out the specific responsibilities in respect of ensuring a safe workplace.

In addition, those in control of premises have duties under the Occupiers Liability

Act 1984. This states (s2) that the occupier owes a "common law duty of care" and then goes on to define that as: "A duty to take such care as in the circumstance of the case is reasonable to see that the visitor will be reasonably safe in using the premises for the purposes for which he is invited or permitted by the occupier to be there."

This clearly extends to the control of slip and trip hazards.

Key Questions

The following questions should be asked in order to determine whether there is a hazard.

- Is the floor surface in good condition?
- Are floors likely to become wet and slippery?
- Can floor conditions change quickly? e.g. because of build up of waste
- Do people use unlit or poorly lit paths or yard areas?
- Are tripping hazards such as trailing cables routed away from walkways or covered/protected in some way?
- Are cleaning rotas organised to avoid busy times?
- Are cleaning substances chosen to reduce risk of slippery surfaces?



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How to prevent slips and trips?

Both slips and trips result from some unintended or unexpected change in the contact between the feet and the ground or walking surface. This shows that good housekeeping, quality and condition of the surfaces and an appropriate pace of walking are critical for preventing fall accidents and selection of proper footwear. Whilst the last of these is not under the control of a property owner simple control strategies can cope with the other aspects.

Surfaces

New Surfaces:

- Specify non slip surfaces
- Ensure design is free from trip hazards

Existing Surfaces:

- Ensure they kept in good order
- Promptly repair damage
- Secure coverings such as mats, rugs and carpets

Housekeeping

Good housekeeping is the first and the most important method of preventing falls due to slips and trips. It includes:

- Cleaning all spills immediately
- Marking spills and wet areas
- 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, speciality footwear or training on techniques of walking and safe falling will never be fully effective.

Traffic Flow

- Set up clear routes
- Avoid overcrowding
- Try to plan routes to reduce temptation to rush/run



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Risk Assessment

A risk assessment should be undertaken to identify possible slip and trip hazards.

- Look for slip and trip hazards
- Decide who might be harmed and how
- Consider the risks:
- Are there suitable controls in place?
- If not, determine new/improved control and implement
- Record findings
- Review on a regular basis

The Magic "Inch"

Property owners often enquire about the extent to which they might be held liable for an accident that 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? The answer is that there is no "safe" limit, no hard and fast rule. Every claim for compensation will be decided on its own

Merits and the particular circumstances that relate to the accident. 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:

- Ensure that new flooring surfaces are installed so that they are, as far as is practicable, free from tripping and slipping hazards
- Conduct routine inspections to ensure all surfaces are free from slip and trip hazards.
- Ensure that routine maintenance is carried out to remedy defects
- Implement a sound housekeeping programme
- Set up a programme to ensure that spills are identified/reported and cleaned up immediately

References

Preventing slips, trips and falls at work INDG 225 Free Workplace health, safety and welfare INDG 224 Free Slips and trips HSG115 ISBN 0 7176 1145 £7.50 Available from HSE Books HSE Slips and Trips topic page: www.hse.gov.uk/slipsindex.htm



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