

Slips, Trips and Falls: Management Briefing

According to the Health and Safety Executive, slips, trips and falls are the single most common cause of major incidents in UK workplaces, accounting for 20% of all reported specified (major) injuries in 2016/2017.

The Key Risk Factors Are:

- Poor lighting that prevents people seeing obstructions, slippery surfaces etc.
- damaged or incorrect flooring
- obstructions and objects left lying around
- inappropriate footwear.

Recommendations for Employers:

- Assess the risks to workers, decide how significant the risks are, prevent or control the risks and develop a clear management plan
- consult with the workforce and their representatives about risk assessments and actions
- ensure everyone is aware of the risk assessments and procedures in place.

Control Methods or Risk Reduction Techniques must be used to:

- Ensure conditions are correct from the start. Ensure flooring and lighting are fit for purpose and have the appropriate surface roughness characteristics
- provide staff with information and training on good working practice
- adopt a programme of planned preventative maintenance and undertake repairs when identified
- where floors may become wet or contaminated, ensure they are suitable for the purpose, regularly inspected and dried immediately
- ensure spillages are promptly cleaned up
- ensure appropriate signage is displayed when areas are being cleaned and removed when the floor can be used normally
- ensure all accidents are investigated and staff made aware of the findings and actions taken.

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Case Law

Accidents caused by slips, trips and falls in the workplace can result in substantial awards for damages. Employers can be sued for negligence for failing to provide a safe place of work for both employees and visitors.

A supermarket worker who fell when she slipped in cream spilled by a customer awarded £200,000 for injuries she suffered. Although cleaners had mopped the original spillage, the worker fell heavily at the same spot because the floor had not been cleaned effectively and was left greasy. Had the supermarket cleaned the area properly and provided barriers until the area was safe, the worker would not have slipped on the grease. Employers must ensure they maintain a safe working environment for their staff at all times.

Legal Duties

The key areas of health and safety law relevant to slips, trips and falls are:

- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HSWA)
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992
- The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977