

Facilities Management from A to Z

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lips & Trips

Slips, trips and falls are the largest cause of accidents in all business sectors from heavy manufacturing through to basic office work. 29% of over-3-day workplace injuries reported in 2011/12 involved a slip, trip or fall and 83% of those were slips and trips.

These accidents can be caused by a number of problems all of which are facilities related including poorly maintained paving, wet floors, lack of signposts when cleaning, and obstacles in walkways. Another frequent problem are accidents caused by inappropriate footwear. The facility manager cannot control what shoes visitors are wearing but can at least ensure that their cleaners aren't trying to run upstairs in stiletto heels.

There is a four-step approach to reducing the risk of this kind of injury. The first step to be explored should be prevention to eliminate the risk at source; for example, by levelling uneven floor surfaces. The next preferred approach is substitution; for example, using an alternative method of floor cleaning. This is followed by separation; for example, using barriers to keep people away from wet floors. The final measure is protection; for example, wearing footwear with non-slip soles.

Flooring is a key. Surfaces should not be too slippery and any flooring must be properly fitted to reduce trip hazards. Uneven surfaces and curled up carpet edges need to be attended to and fixed or adequately signposted to prevent slips, trips and falls. Stairs should be well lit, evenly spaced and fitted with a suitable handrail.

Cleaning is a vital component of keeping slips, trips and falls at bay, along with clearing up items from the floor which could become tripping hazards, and cleaning up spillages which might cause someone to slip over. However, the cleaning process itself has the potential to cause slips, trips and falls, and any wet floors or items involved in cleaning need to be signposted or cleared away to prevent slips and trips.

Obstacles such as boxes, tools or deliveries left unattended in corridors and circulation routes are an obvious tripping hazard, however all too often they are left unaddressed. The facilities team must ensure that walkways clear at all times and that trailing wires and other potential hazards are removed, concealed or well signposted. This is especially important in high risk areas like staircases, kitchens or machinery rooms.

Good facilities housekeeping is fundamental. The organisation has a duty of care towards those on their property. The facility manager should therefore be aware of the risks associated with such accidents and act upon those risks where necessary. Otherwise, the organisation could be liable to pay compensation to anyone injured on their premises.

The Health and Safety Executive has a website section with advice specifically aimed at reducing Slips and Trips:
www.hse.gov.uk/slips