

PREVENTING SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR



Health and Safety Guidance Notes



NFU Mutual
RISK MANAGEMENT SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

Slips, trips and falls are a significant cause of injury in the hospitality sector. Despite often being seen as minor incidents, they accounted for a third of all non-fatal workplace injuries in 2020/21¹.

Although often perceived as unavoidable, implementing the correct measures, such as effective risk management, can have a significant impact on risk, improve safety for staff and customers, improve defensibility, and reduce business costs significantly.

This document highlights what could cause slips, trips and falls, and how to identify and manage the risks to help prevent workplace injuries from occurring.

SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS

Although they're often thought of as one type of incident, slips, trips and falls have different causes with different solutions required to minimise the risk of each. Falls can also happen for reasons other than a slip or trip.

They can be defined as follows:

- **Slip** – a lack of grip causes uncontrolled sliding of the foot
- **Trip** – the person catches their foot on an obstacle causing a loss of balance
- **Fall** – an unrecovered loss of balance, this can occur because of a slip or trip but also for other reasons such as misplacing your feet on stairs or vertigo related health issues.

KEY BUSINESS AREAS:

Kitchens

Kitchens are busy work areas where water and oil are common contaminants on the floor, especially in kitchens that use deep fat fryers. A slip or trip in the kitchen has increased potential to cause serious injury due to sharp objects, hot surfaces and hot materials/food being carried. To minimise the risk, you should practise the following:

- A well-planned cleaning regime which is executed several times throughout the day to avoid oil and grease build up (read more about cleaning on page 6)
- Remove any cleaning solution during the cleaning process and don't allow it to air dry, as this results in a build-up of oil on the floor
- Keep walkways in kitchens clear of equipment, packaging and other potential trip hazards by storing items in allocated storage spaces and make sure your staff training emphasises the importance of good housekeeping. Simple hazards can lead to serious injuries, especially during busy times (read more about trip hazards on page 5)
- Provide suitable slip resistant footwear and consider footwear cleaning stations or carefully maintained matting near the entrance to the kitchen to prevent oil and other slippery substances being walked into other areas
- Introduce appropriate slip resistant flooring that can cope with the wet, oily or greasy conditions of a typical kitchen, including inside and around walk-in freezers
- Review the freezer stocking procedures to help reduce ice build-up (i.e. from keeping the freezer doors open for a long time) and regularly check and replace freezer seals in order to minimise condensation around the freezer doors. (read more about flooring on page 6).

¹ www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overall/hssh2021.pdf

Dining Areas

Though contamination of the floor is likely to be less frequent than in kitchens, food and drink spills are common in dining areas and can leave flooring slippery, presenting a risk to both staff and customers. This is particularly true in ‘self-service’ areas such as salad bars and around self-serve drink or ice cream machines, where customers may overfill containers and spill food or drink without reporting it or cleaning it up effectively. To minimise this risk, consider the following:

- Carry out a realistic risk assessment of the area considering the likelihood of spills and the potential consequence of a slip
- Where you cannot prevent flooring becoming contaminated and immediate cleaning is not always practical, a suitable slip resistant floor will provide effective protection from slips
- Where contamination is not a frequent problem, timely effective cleaning of spills can reduce the risk of slips
- Avoid increasing the slip risk by wet mopping and spreading the spill where possible. Wet contaminants can usually be dried up easily using a paper towel or wet vacuum, although in some cases a detergent solution will be necessary to remove oil or grease from a floor (e.g. from food spills)
- Routinely check/audit dining areas and remove debris, such as solid food waste, in a timely manner. Keep records of your spot checks to evidence how often this is carried out and review near miss and hazard spotting reports regularly (read more about reporting on page 8)
- If there are any changes in the floor specification, review the cleaning regime and modify where necessary.

Entrances

The entrance to a building is a critical area for managing slip risks. The design of the entrance system will determine how effective it is at controlling contamination. The entrance system consists of the external floor surface, any canopy present, the door, the matting, and the floor immediately inside the building. To successfully reduce these risks, consider the following:

- Assess how effective your current entrance system (both staff and public entrances) is by studying it on a rainy day. Is water walked into the building and, if so, how far does it come in?
- Is your matting long enough and made of an appropriate material to effectively remove moisture from footwear? The mat will need to be made out of an absorbent material and long enough for people to get several footsteps on the mat (up to 7 meters depending on the entrance design and the matting material).

Toilets

Toilets are a foreseeably wet area and the flooring should present low slip potential when wet. It’s common to see smooth flooring in public toilets with wet floor signs placed out as the sole method of preventing slips. This approach is ineffective at preventing slips and is unlikely to constitute the legal duty of doing ‘everything reasonably practicable’, as discussed in the ‘Cleaning’ section on page 6.

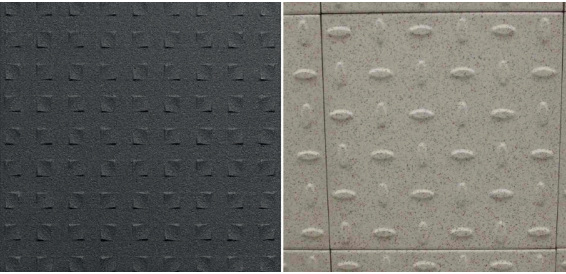
Toilets in converted buildings (e.g. pubs that were once domestic premises) are often accessed by stairs. The stairs may conform to old domestic Building Regulations and can present a significant risk of falls when used frequently and by people who have been drinking alcohol.

Guest Bathrooms and Swimming Pools

Slip accidents are common in areas where people walk barefoot (for example changing rooms, hotel bathrooms and swimming pools) as these areas are likely to be wet when in use. The presence of very small amounts of water or other contamination can significantly reduce the grip available between the floor surface and the person’s foot.

Due to the types of environments where people are normally barefoot, it’s not usually practical to stop slips by preventing contamination from getting on to the floor or providing slip resistant footwear. The most effective control will be a well specified floor, such as:

- A surface that presents a low slip risk for both barefoot people and those wearing footwear and has been pendulum tested (read more about pendulum testing on page 6).
- A level flooring material with a suitable surface finish which will provide more predictable slip resistance and may be easier to clean compared to surfaces with raised profiles, pictured below:



Examples of profiled surfaces

It is important to note that water will not be the only contaminant present in barefoot areas and a detergent solution will be needed to clean the floor effectively. As an example, cleaning poolside tiles using only the pool water will not effectively remove other contaminants, especially from slip resistant flooring.

When it’s not practical to replace an existing floor surface, consider the following:

- Where possible, use a treatment or coating to improve the slip resistance but be aware many treatments contain acid, which can present significant chemical risks.
- Be careful when considering the use of matting. The slip resistance of commonly used rubber mats is not well understood, and matting may not offer a significant improvement in slip resistance over the floor it is covering. In the worst-case scenario, matting may increase slip risk as the mat is another surface between the persons foot and the floor that could move.
- If providing overshoes (e.g. to prevent dirt being walked onto the floor), do not issue the typical plastic variety which significantly increases the risk of a slip. Source reusable rubber overshoes with slip resistant soles from manufacturers of 5-star GRIP rated footwear . These have proved to be very effective to protect staff working in barefoot areas (read more about footwear on page 7).

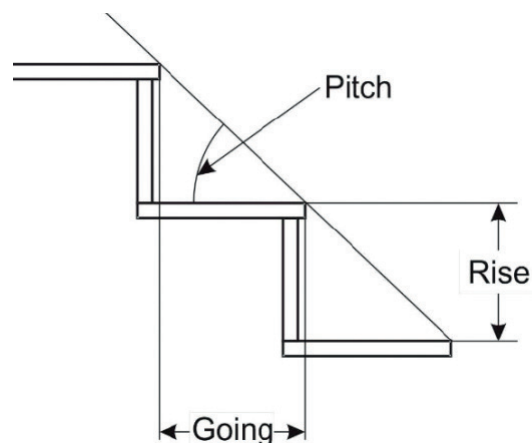
Steps and Stairs

A fall on stairs, particularly in descent, often leads to serious injury and sometimes even death. Falls on stairs are often seen as simply human error, but stair design has a huge influence on the likelihood of someone making a mistake when using the stairs. Human behaviour is hard to control but good stair design reduces fall risk for all stair users.

There are simple and inexpensive interventions that can make existing stairs safer, such as:

- Well-designed handrails that provide a visual and tactile cue to the pitch of the stair, a physical aid to stair use and a means of preventing a fall should a loss of balance occur. To be effective, handrails need to be well designed so that the person on the stair knows where they are, can easily reach them and can secure a good grip. By asking staff to hold the handrail it will prevent them from carrying objects in both hands which is a high-risk activity on stairs
- Highlights and edges. The front edge of the step, known as the nosing, should be clearly highlighted to define the edge of the tread to help people place their feet safely. You can improve visual contrast on stair nosings in several ways, including painting the edges or installing commercially available nosing highlights. The contrast needed is not dependent on colour and can therefore be aesthetically pleasing as well as a simple way of reducing fall risk
- Appropriate stair dimension and consistency. Trips often occur if the “goings” are too small or smaller than expected due to inconsistencies (the depth of a tread), causing the foot to be placed too far forwards on the step or if the “rise” is too large or larger than expected due to inconsistencies (the height of a tread). Inconsistencies in stair dimensions can often be eliminated quite easily by adding material to the treads.

Do not assume that there is nothing you can do to improve a stair with inconsistent rises or goings.



Car Parks

Trips are common in car parks. Good maintenance of walking surfaces and clearly highlighting kerbs will help to reduce trip risk. Good lighting is essential if trips are to be prevented, especially when car parks are used in the dark. Installing dropped kerbs at crossings is helpful for wheelchair users and provides a level crossing with no need to negotiate a kerb.

PREVENTING SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS

There are two common factors that lead to a trip:

- An obstacle or uneven surface in the walking route
- A failure by the pedestrian to clear the obstacle with their foot (often because they have not seen it).

HSE summarises the factors in the trip potential triangle shown below:

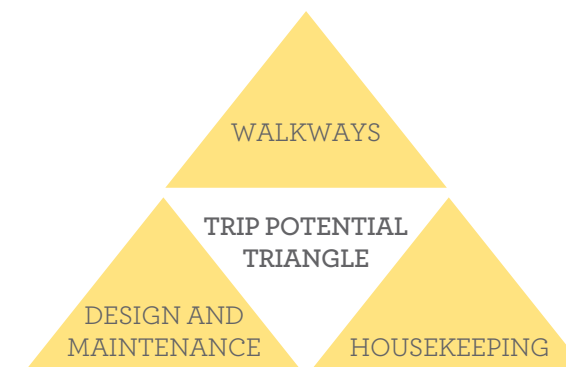


Figure 1. HSE Trip Potential Triangle

Almost all workplaces have trip hazards; some are the result of poor risk management and could be easily removed (e.g. stock, packing materials, or trailing cables on the floor), whereas others are design features which may be more challenging to address (e.g. single steps or bunding around equipment). Uneven surfaces, temporary obstacles and changes in level can all interrupt a person's gait and cause them to trip. Research suggests that an obstacle or change in level as little as 10mm high can present a trip hazard to a healthy working age person.

Cleaning is an important element of good housekeeping, which is essential for minimising trip hazards. However, a lot of the equipment used for cleaning has the potential to introduce trip hazards, so plan carefully. Equipment such as vacuums and scrubber dryers often have trailing cables, and these along with low lying items such as buckets, waste bags and even warning signs, can present a trip hazard. Minimise the length of trailing cables by always using the nearest socket to the current work area and keep walkways free of obstructions.

Alongside the potential trip hazards mentioned, you must also consider the different factors that can cause a slip when undertaking risk assessments or investigating incidents. The key factors can be seen in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Slip Potential Model, which is shown below.

By taking a look at each section carefully you can find many ways to minimise the risk of slips, trips and falls within the workplace.

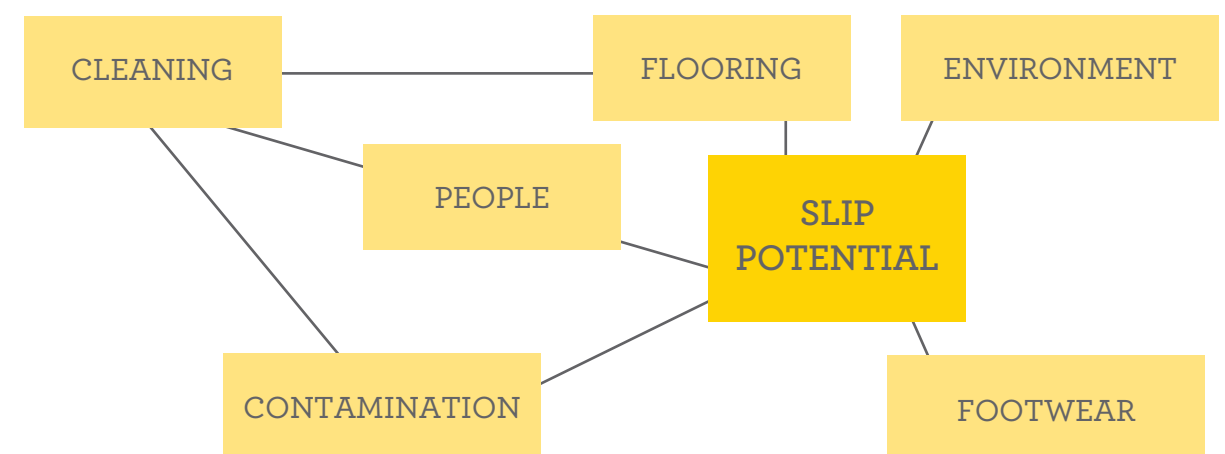


Figure 2. HSE Slip Potential Model

² www.hse.gov.uk/slips/preventing.htm

Flooring

Selecting an appropriate level of slip resistance when specifying a new floor will save you money in management and incident costs throughout the lifespan of the floor.

Having an appropriate floor installed is the most effective control measure for preventing slips as it protects everyone walking on it. Clean, dry floors are not normally slippery. If floors become contaminated during normal use, you need to understand the risk of people slipping in such conditions, this will ensure that you manage the risk appropriately. It’s important to note that not all floors are slippery when contaminated; excellent slip resistant flooring is available.

Water is the most common contaminant in most slips, but oils, dusts and powders can all make floors slippery.

The best way to measure slip resistance is the Pendulum test, the only test recommended for specifying the slip resistance of flooring by the HSE. It is designed to assess pedestrian slip risk in both dry and contaminated conditions and it can be used in the laboratory and on site, making it ideal for assessing or monitoring installed flooring.

Many other tests exist for the slip resistance of flooring but few of them provide enough information to assess the risk. Some of them are limited to laboratory testing, only making them inappropriate for assessing the floors you have installed in your workplace. Where necessary, seek support from an independent expert when specifying or measuring slip resistant flooring.

Other Flooring Considerations

It is frequently assumed that flooring with a raised pattern or profile, such as metal chequer plate or profiled ceramic tiles, will offer good slip resistance, but this is often not true.

Think about where in the building the floor will be laid. It may be in a clean dry area but what other parts of the building are next to it (e.g. a serving area next to a kitchen).

Sloped surfaces will need to offer more grip than level floors to prevent slips. Even shallow slopes, such as those used in swimming pools or showers for drainage, will increase the level of grip you need to walk on them safely. However, the drainage they offer will not leave the floor dry.

Installed floors can be modified to improve their slip resistance, although installing a suitable slip resistant floor in the first place is a better solution than installing a floor that becomes slippery and having to treat it.

Cleaning

When dealing with wet spills on smooth floors, use an absorbent material or wet vacuum to dry up the spill effectively. Keep people off the floor as it dries.

The cleaning process needs to effectively remove contamination from the surface to minimise slip risk. A build-up of dirt can compromise slip resistance over time, even on safety flooring. Don’t assume that wet mopping is the most effective way of cleaning your floors, other techniques, such as using a correctly operated scrubber-dryer, may be more suitable.

When removing oily or greasy contamination use a detergent solution at the right concentration. The solution will need some contact time with the floor and will need to be removed effectively from the surface afterwards.

Cleaning can be an effective control measure to minimise slip risk, but it requires careful planning and managing. Cleaning regimes may need to be modified following a change in

flooring or local contamination and cleaning staff need to be trained and supervised to ensure that cleaning is conducted appropriately. Review your cleaning regimes regularly to ensure they remain effective.

The Use of Wet Floor Signs

Wet floor signs are often relied upon as a primary control measure for preventing slips, however, signs must only be used as the last line of defence when all other controls have been implemented.

Putting out a wet floor sign to warn people about a cleaning activity is something reasonably practical to help manage the risk but you should also consider the cleaning processes, training, timing, management, and supervision to cover all basis.

Barriers are much more effective than warning signs at keeping people off contaminated areas, as they define the extent of the contaminated area more effectively and require more effort to bypass. Cleaning in sections, and ensuring each area is completely dry before moving to the next, can keep people off a wet floor whilst allowing them access to other parts of the building.

Footwear

Selecting appropriate slip resistant footwear can be difficult, because despite some manufacturers claims, some safety footwear branded as slip resistant has poor grip when in use. The HSE GRIP rating scheme is the best method of selecting suitable slip resistant footwear. GRIP rated footwear will have a rating between 1 and 5 stars, with 5-star footwear being the most slip resistant. Specify footwear as part of a risk assessment, not all environments require 5-star shoes, in many cases 2 or 3-star footwear will have a significant impact on slip risk.

Trial new footwear in your workplace before issuing to all staff. Involve staff in footwear trials to get feedback on issues specific to your workplace and improve staff engagement. Whilst carrying out these trials you must do so carefully by minimising all other risks of slipping, the key factors to consider can be seen in the HSE Slip Potential Model.

Effective slip resistant footwear can be inexpensive, especially when compared to the cost of a slip. Slip resistant footwear can also be effective when worn outdoors and can be a suitable control measure for staff, where the public access your buildings. Staff will spend more time on your premises than members of the public and are likely to undertake higher risk activities while at work.

People

When investigating falls, it’s easy to assume that they are purely the result of human error, however, the likelihood of the error is also influenced by a range of environmental and task factors.

By assuming that a fall was simply due to human error without identifying any additional root causes, it’s difficult to learn from an incident and make sensible improvements to prevent similar falls in the future. When undertaking risk assessments or investigating incidents, consider all contributing factors covered in this document. You may also need to think about the needs of people accessing your workplace. Are staff or visitors likely to have mobility or visual impairments? Does the design and operation of your workplace cater for all users?

Alongside this, studies have shown that being distracted by a conversation (eg. using a mobile phone), reduces an individual’s attention on their surroundings. The more mentally challenging the conversation, the greater the distraction can be. Medical conditions and some prescription medication

can also impair cognition and slow reaction times. Additional factors such as the effect of alcohol or carrying items in both hands can also increase the risk of falls.

It should be noted that an individual under the influence of alcohol or using a mobile phone is likely to be at greater risk of falling when negotiating a hazard. If an incident occurs where mobile phone use or the influence of drugs and alcohol is a factor, ensure that all root causes are identified. If a pedestrian trips over an obstacle while using a mobile phone, and the investigation concludes that the fall was simply the result of human error due to distraction, then you're not in a position to address the underlying hazard, and the risk will remain for all people using the area.

In licenced premises it is likely that customers will have been consuming alcohol and it is the responsibility of employers to provide a safe environment for all building users and take reasonable steps to minimise risk. Environmental control measures and safe systems should be in place to ensure that slip, trip and fall risks are suitably managed for all customers.

Environment

Simple changes to the work environment can make a significant difference to fall risk.

Effective lighting is important to give people the opportunity to identify slip and trip hazards and safely negotiate stairs. Hazardous situations can be created by poor lighting, glare and shadows. It takes time for our eyes to adjust to lighting levels in different areas, this is especially true for older people. Therefore it's important to consider the visibility of the environment at different times of day and different times of the year.

NEAR MISS REPORTING AND INCIDENT INVESTIGATION

All too often, the solutions to slip and trip issues are only identified following an unpleasant fall.

When a fall occurs, it is vital that an investigation is conducted as soon as possible. This will help to identify what contributed to the incident occurring and highlight where changes could be made, to minimise the risk of a similar event happening again.

Before starting the investigation make sure that the risk to everyone involved has been minimised and any actions taken to make the area safe are recorded as part of the investigation. It's also important for all those involved to know the differences between a slip, a trip and a fall and to understand exactly what took place.

Falls can happen very quickly, and even the injured party can't always recall what caused or contributed to the fall. Be aware that people often use the terms 'slip', 'trip' and 'fall' interchangeably as a description of losing their balance. If a person slips, they tend to fall backwards, if they trip, they tend to fall forwards (though this is not always true). It's important to establish what the person was doing at the time of the event and where the incident took place.

Though the terms 'slip' and 'trip' are often used in stair fall reports, stair falls are influenced by a range of human and design factors as mentioned previously. Even a genuine incident of a foot slipping from a stair is often more heavily influenced by the size of the stair and design, rather than friction values or the cleanliness of the stair.

When recording the location of the fall be as specific as possible. This will help you to identify trends and prevent future incidents.

If you'd like help with your risk management, including help in managing your slip, trip and fall risks, NFU Mutual Risk Management Services Limited are on hand to provide you with cost-effective advice on reducing risks and accidents, together with practical support.

We offer a suite of Health & Safety options to suit a variety of needs, saving you time and making your business a safer environment for everyone. Our services include: Site and Task Based Risk Assessments, Health & Safety Audits and Hazard Spots, Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Assessments, Employee Handbook, Fire Risk Assessments and so much more.

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