



Preventing slips and trips in kitchens and food service

Introduction

Slips and trips are the most common cause of major accidents at work. The costs to industry are substantial at £512 million per year, not counting the incalculable human cost and suffering to those injured.

Legal actions brought as a result of an injury can be extremely damaging to businesses, especially where customers are involved. Insurance covers only a small proportion of the costs.

This information sheet is aimed at employers, although it will also be useful to employees and safety representatives. If you follow this guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law.

What are the chances of a slip or trip in your business?

Consider this:

- People working in kitchens and food service are more likely to be injured through slips and trips than by anything else.
- Simple measures have repeatedly been shown to reduce kitchen slip and trip accidents and injuries dramatically.
- The pace of work in this environment can sometimes be intense compared to other services. This is when accidents are most likely to occur.

Three key points to remember and act on are:

- Most slip injuries happen on wet floors.
- Most trips are due to poor housekeeping.
- Plan ahead to deal with any such problems during busy periods when the pace of work increases.

Slipping injuries

As the vast majority of slip injuries happen on floors that are wet or contaminated (eg with food debris, cooking oil etc), this is the most sensible thing to look at first.

What can be done to prevent slips?

Stop the floor getting wet or being contaminated in the first place

- Maintain equipment to prevent any leaks of oil, water etc.
- Have a system for promptly reporting and dealing with equipment faults.

Catering Information Sheet No 6 (revised)

- Don't allow things to boil over and contaminate the floor.
- Avoid contaminating the floor with dry materials (like plastic bags or flour dust), as these materials can create a very slippery surface.
- Choose the timing of routine floor cleaning so that people are not put at risk and hygiene is not compromised.

Stop the contamination from getting onto walkways

- Stop water getting walked into the kitchen or service area on people's shoes from outdoors or indoors.
- Site any 'messy' operations away from walkways and thoroughfares.
- Use splashguards or edged work surfaces to contain spillages.
- Use lids and covers for pans and containers, especially when they are being carried.
- Have good extraction and ventilation to remove steam and grease before it can be deposited.
- Use drainage channels and drip trays to carry water, steam drips and waste away from tilting kettles, bratt pans and other equipment.

Deal with any wet or contaminated floors that do occur

- Clean up spillages **immediately**. This includes spills on any areas on the customer side (if applicable to your business). Don't forget satellite services or self-service areas.
- Don't leave floors wet after cleaning - clean them to a completely dry finish if at all possible.
- If 'clean-to-dry' is completely impossible then use barriers and 'wet floor' warning signs to **keep people off the wet area**.
- Use cleaning methods that don't spread the problem. Small spillages are often better dealt with using a paper towel instead of a mop that wets the floor.
- Don't use cardboard to soak up spillages, deal with them properly.

After dealing with the risks from water and contaminants on the floor there are quite a few other things that can be done. Generally they should be considered in the order that they appear below.

The floor needs to have enough grip

- The floor gets its grip from its surface roughness. If it isn't cleaned properly or often enough it loses that grip - good cleaning can bring it back.

- Instruct staff how to use the right cleaning methods and materials for your particular floor surface. Ask the floor manufacturer about the best cleaning method, suitable detergents and the correct concentrations to be used when cleaning.
- Proper floor surfaces can have enough roughness to provide grip and be easy to clean to meet food hygiene requirements.
- If these steps don't deal with the slip risk then stick-on anti-slip strips, or surface treatments, might be needed to improve the surface roughness.
- Make sure that anti-slip strips don't cause new tripping hazards.

Lay a new floor with better surface roughness (ie better grip)

In some cases a new floor surface might be needed. If this is necessary, bear in mind the following:

- Specify a floor that will meet your needs, including surface roughness, ease of cleaning and hygiene.
- If you are considering a particular type of floor, enquire about its suitability for an environment such as yours.
- Check that the installation is done properly and the floor matches your specification.
- Make sure any flooring on the customer side of your business does not present a slipping hazard.

Slip assessment

To help you to assess the floor surfaces and other factors in your premises, HSE has developed a free Slip Assessment Tool (SAT). SAT is a computer software package that allows an operator to assess the slip potential of pedestrian walkway surfaces.

The software can be downloaded, free of charge, from: www.hse.gov.uk/slips. It needs to be used in conjunction with a portable surface roughness meter, which must be obtained by the assessor. Meters are not provided by HSE. Information on surface roughness meters can be found at: www.hsesat.info/satmeters.htm.

Check that steps, slopes and changes in level are safe

- Are level changes easily visible?
- Steps and slopes should always have good grip.
- A handrail might be needed.

Visibility and distractions can have a big effect on slip and trip risks

- Where people walk needs to be properly lit.
- Noise, extreme temperature and distractions can deflect people's attention from where they are walking.

Does the type of work itself add to the slip and trip risks?

- Can you remove or reduce the need for people to rush, to take long strides or to turn sharply.
- People carrying, pushing or pulling heavy or bulky loads are much more likely to slip. Can the need to do these things be removed or reduced, eg with trolleys, carts or other manual handling aids?
- If staff are carrying items, are their hands free to hold a handrail or break a fall?
- Rearranging the work area may reduce these problems.

Selecting footwear

- Footwear can be important in preventing slips in the workplace and selecting the right shoe sole can have a big effect on reducing slip injuries. As a minimum, there should be a 'sensible shoe' policy in force.
- Different types of footwear can perform differently in different situations. Get your supplier's advice or ask them to provide trial pairs to help you make the right choice.
- Urethane and rubber soles are often among the least slippery types on wet floors.
- Sole tread patterns should not become clogged with any waste or debris on the floor. If they do then that design of sole is unsuitable for your situation.
- If 'anti-slip' footwear is needed to properly control slip risks then the employer has to provide and pay for it.

Tripping injuries

Most catering trip injuries are caused by obstructions on the floor. The rest are caused by uneven walking surfaces. Remember that staff moving about may not always be able to see where they are putting their feet, especially if they are carrying things.

What can be done to prevent kitchen trips?

Uneven surfaces and changes in level

- Inspect floors for holes, damage or unevenness (such as loose or broken tiles) where someone could trip.
- Highlight any changes in level and steps.
- Make any slopes on walkways gradual and clearly visible.
- Use high-visibility nosing strips on the edge of steps. (Make sure that they are securely fixed.)

Good housekeeping

- Organise the workspace so that everything has a place.
- Arrange any workflows to avoid 'bottlenecks' in the work process.

- Don't allow articles to cause obstructions. Avoid placing pans, packages or wrappings on the floor where someone can trip over them.
- A well-organised goods in (or out) system may help, so that deliveries are not placed where they will obstruct where people walk.
- Make sure there is enough storage space for ingredients and equipment in daily use. Again, consider traffic patterns to heavily used items.
- Provide enough waste bins in convenient locations so that packaging, waste etc can be disposed of straight away.
- Mark out walkways to make it easier to see that they are being kept clear.
- Never allow cables or pipes to trail across the floor.
- Remember to check the customer side of the counter (if applicable to your business).

Other anti-trip measures

- Check external areas of the building (such as bin stores and delivery areas) for tripping hazards. Check for proper lighting, as shadows and glare can prevent pedestrians from seeing trip hazards.
- Distractions and poor visibility can increase slip and trip risks.
- Where people walk needs to be properly lit so that obstructions and changes in level are visible.

Getting everyone involved

- Make sure that everyone working in an area has a good understanding of the right way to work and the precautions to take.
- Regular supervision is needed to make sure staff are following instructions about safe practice.
- It is a good idea to involve employees at all levels when looking at risks and agreeing the safety measures needed. With this approach, you are more likely to successfully tackle the hazard and get employees to comply with any necessary action.
- Safety representatives should be consulted as they may identify problems or come up with solutions that you may not have considered.

Training

- Problems can be caused by lack of awareness among staff, carelessness, not understanding how slips or trips occur, lack of training etc.
- Train, inform and supervise staff on important points such as the significance of spillages, 'cleaning as you go', reporting equipment defects, how to use and care for safety measures (including footwear), the importance of thorough cleaning and drying of floors, and reporting incidents as soon as they occur.

What the law says

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSW Act) requires employers to ensure the health and safety of all employees and anyone who may be affected by their work. This includes taking steps to control slip and trip risks.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 build on the HSW Act and include duties on employers to assess risks (including slip and trip risks) and take action to control these risks.

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 require floors to be suitable, in good condition and free from obstructions.

Case studies

Young worker in slip and trip accident



While working in the kitchens of a restaurant chain, a 17-year-old boy tripped, slipped and consequently immersed his left hand into a fryer unit full of hot oil, causing severe burns to his arm, parts of the chest and neck.

On the day of the accident, he was socialising outside the restaurant when one of the restaurant supervisors approached and pressurised him to work earlier than his normal shift, as the restaurant was busy. The boy wanted to go home to collect his chef's jacket but was told there was no time. Instead, he was given a normal short-sleeved shirt and another member of staff's greasy pair of shoes, which were ill fitting. The front soles were badly worn and damaged.

The kitchen floor was contaminated with grease and staff had placed cardboard sheets on the floor to absorb it, which was common practice at the restaurant. He tripped on cardboard, and as he tried to regain balance he slipped and plunged his left arm into

the fryer unit, which was located at the end of the cooking line.

The underlying problem of the greasy floor had not been dealt with. Putting down cardboard only introduced another tripping hazard, which was made worse by the unsuitable footwear.

Unsuitable flooring contributed to slip accident



A female employee of a high street retail chain's restaurant fractured her skull after slipping in the dishwashing area of the kitchen. Her injuries were so severe, she spent 11 days in a high-dependency unit. She has been unable to return to work since the accident.

Four similar incidents had occurred in the same kitchen during the previous 12 months, yet the company had done little to correct an obvious slip hazard. The investigation found that even under relatively low levels of wet contamination, the risk of slipping was unacceptably high due to unsuitable flooring.

Modification or replacement of the floor surface would have reduced the risk of slipping. In addition, footwear with good slip resistance may have reduced the risk further.

Further reading

Websites

HSE's slips and trips site: www.hse.gov.uk/slips

HSE's catering and hospitality industry site: www.hse.gov.uk/catering

The Slip Assessment Tool and information about surface roughness meters: www.hsesat.info

Other guidance

Stop slips: Managing slips to reduce injuries and cost
Video HSE Books 2000 ISBN 0 7176 1819 6

Preventing slips in the food and drink industries: Technical update on floor specifications
Food Information Sheet FIS22 HSE Books 1999

Further information

HSE priced and free publications are available by mail order from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995 Website: www.hsebooks.co.uk (HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops and free leaflets can be downloaded from HSE's website: www.hse.gov.uk.)

For information about health and safety ring HSE's Infoline Tel: 0845 345 0055 Fax: 0845 408 9566 e-mail: hseinformationservices@natbrit.com or write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

This guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Following the guidance is not compulsory and you are free to take other action. But if you do follow the guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. Health and safety inspectors seek to secure compliance with the law and may refer to this guidance as illustrating good practice.

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