



## **Risk control**

Proper footwear  
for the job!



In partnership with



# Proper footwear for the job!

## Introduction

Did you know that poor footwear is often the cause of serious falls? Footwear such as sandals, flip-flops, clogs, crocs and very high heels may be a fashionable option, but when worn in the wrong environment they can be very dangerous.

Slips, trips and falls in the classroom, hallways, office areas and outdoors can be one of the most frequently reported (and expensive!) claims faced by organisations. Choosing correct footwear for the workplace / work activity is the first step to preventing these types of accidents and their subsequent consequences.

## Guidelines for Selection

Choose footwear that is appropriate to the work activity, work environment and feet.

Make sure that the footwear selected is comfortable, but also conducive to preventing slipping in the work environment as well as during any adverse weather conditions.

Footwear that presents a high probability of slipping and falling includes:

- Leather soles / high heels – choose footwear with slip-resistant soles and a low heel.
- Soiled or contaminated soles - clean or remove mud, oil or any other traction-reducing material from shoe / boot soles.
- Footwear that has worn out soles - replace this footwear immediately as slip-resistance is greatly reduced.
- Sole material that is inappropriate for the work surface / floor conditions - avoid leather soles on wet floor surface conditions. Choose lower heels for work operations and tasks, etc.
- Also be aware of trousers that are too long. They can catch on objects and cause tripping accidents.

Additionally, when purchasing new footwear, consider these tips to avoid slips and trips:

- Do not try on shoes when feet are hurting.
- The best time to try on shoes is in the mid-afternoon. When trying on shoes wear the hosiery or socks that would normally be worn.
- Always have both feet measured because feet may not be the same size. When choosing shoes, the length, width and depth of the shoes are important to consider.

- Make sure that there is enough room at the front of the shoes (about 1cm of space between the longest toe and the end of the shoe) to allow for natural movement of toes when walking.
- Make sure there is enough room so that toes can be comfortably wiggled.
- Try on both shoes, properly laced, and walk around the shop.
- Walk over varying surfaces of the floor to further check the fit of the shoe.
- Keep in mind that as people get older, their feet tend to get larger, so have them measured periodically.

## Steps for Prevention

- 1 DON'T BE IN A HURRY** - Trips and falls often occur while people are in a hurry because they often take short cuts and don't pay attention to what they are doing.
- 2 PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR STEP** - Avoid injuries by paying attention. Learning to recognise hazards and avoiding potential hazards can reduce the chances of injury. As mentioned previously, resist the temptation to take short-cuts because they can consist of unstable, shaky or slippery surfaces.
- 3 CLEAN UP SPILLS** - Slippery surfaces often don't appear dangerous until people step on them—and then it's too late to prevent the consequences of those actions. Clean up grease, water and other spills as soon as they occur. Cover icy and greasy floors with sand, dirt or other types of absorbent materials. If the spill cannot be cleaned immediately, report it without delay to any maintenance staff or supervisor.
- 4 PRACTICE WALKING SAFELY** - If walking on slippery or wet surfaces cannot be avoided, practice walking safely across them using appropriate footwear only. Don't try to run, jump or slide across these slick surfaces. Instead, take slow short steps with your toes pointed slightly outward. For additional balance, keep hands at the sides (not in pockets) to provide support if a fall occurs. Remember that a freshly polished floor can also be very slick even though it doesn't usually appear hazardous.
- 5 USE NON-SLIP SHOES AND SURFACES WHEN AVAILABLE** - If a work area has slippery surfaces, wear shoes that have slip-resistant soles. Keep shoes free from grease and oil. On large walkways, use mats or rough grade coverings to assist in minimising the chance of falls.
- 6 MAINTAIN PROPER LIGHTING** - Inadequate lighting can camouflage what is in the way, so replace light fixtures or bulbs that don't work. When entering a darkened room,

always turn on the light first, even if staying only for a moment. Keep walkways clear of obstructions in all cases, but especially areas that have poor lighting.

- 7 STAIR SAFETY** - Stairs that are too steep or not steep enough can create the potential for trips and falls. Because it is very easy to lose footing while climbing stairs, walk up and down stairs slowly. Be cautious of worn or broken steps, objects left on the steps, and of insufficient lighting that may make it difficult to see properly. Never run up or down stairs and avoid skipping steps. If carrying a load while climbing stairs, carry the load so it doesn't block vision, and keep one hand free, if possible, to hold onto the stair or wall railing.
- 8 INSPECT LADDERS** - Check ladders to ensure the rungs are in good condition and that it has no cracks or broken parts. If the ladder is equipped with a spreader that locks the ladder frame into position, make sure it is secured before beginning to climb. Most importantly, check to make sure the ladder is the correct height for the task at hand. This will prevent over-reaching which could cause a fall from height.
- 9 NEVER USE MAKESHIFT LADDERS** - Never use chairs, furniture, boxes or other makeshift platforms in place of a ladder.
- 10 CORDS AND CABLES** - Re-route cords and cables that may be present across aisles, in front of desks or along walkways. Other options include covering cords that run across an aisle with a protective bridge or hanging loose cables from pre-gummed hooks.

## Procurement of Footwear

Choosing footwear from a host of products which are on the market can be difficult. With terminology such as 'improved grip performance' to 'excellent multi directional slip resistance'. Usually footwear is described as slip resistant but with no indication on which surface and for what roles it would be suitable.

So when purchasing a number of factors need to be considered such as:

- Slip resistance
- Durability
- Comfort
- Cost
- Safety features – toe protection

The final choice may have to be a compromise.

It's always a good idea to check with suppliers whether footwear has been slip-resistance tested. Where footwear has been tested, coefficient of friction (CoF)

test values should be available. The higher the CoF value, the better the slip resistance of the footwear.

The minimum requirements are set out in annex A of EN ISO EN ISO 20345:2021<sup>1</sup> – footwear that has passed a slip resistance test will be marked with the following codes

SRA – tested on ceramic tile wetted with dilute soap solution

SRB – tested on smooth steel and glycerol

SRC – tested under both conditions

These tests are not wholly representative of all underfoot surfaces, so additional information will have to be sort to help identify the best footwear for a particular environment<sup>2</sup>.

## Conclusion

There are numerous factors which contribute to an individual slipping or tripping resulting in a fall. One of which is footwear. The term 'one size fits all' doesn't apply in this case as everyone's feet are different. So footwear needs to be carefully considered if buying in bulk as people will make their feelings known if they are expected to wear uncomfortable shoes for 8 hrs a day. If you are allowing personal to purchase footwear themselves then clear guidelines must be given to staff in relation to the requirements of the footwear they are expected to wear.

## References

- 1** [ISO 20345:2021\(en\), Personal protective equipment — Safety footwear](#)
- 2** <https://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/footprocure.htm> (Revised Nov 2021)

## Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

## Get in touch

For more information, please contact your broker, RMP risk control consultant or account director.

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