Risk control

Slips, Trips and Falls Toolkit: Flooring, Cleaning and Contamination

In partnership with

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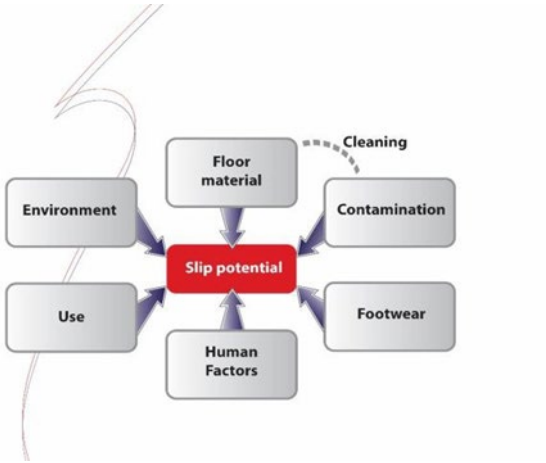
Introduction

The Slip Potential Model[1] identifies common issues that contribute to slip accidents. It helps in identifying possible controls to stop future accidents in the workplace. Some of these points are expanded on in other guidance documents as part of this Slip, Trip and Fall Toolkit.



The Slip Potential Model

Flooring

Having the appropriate floor installed is the most effective control measure for preventing slips for anyone walking on it. Clean, dry floors are not slippery.

If floors become contaminated during normal use, it needs to be understood what the risk of a slip is in those conditions. Not all floors are slippery when contaminated.

Water is the most common contaminant in most slips, but oils, dusts and powders can all make floors more slippery. Flooring that is shiny is usually slippery when wet and does not require much water to make it slippery[2].

A recognised way to measure slip resistance is the Pendulum test. It is designed to assess pedestrian slip risk in both dry and contaminated conditions and crucially it can be used both in the laboratory and on site, making it ideal for assessing or monitoring installed flooring. The test can be done with two different rubber materials, one that simulates pedestrians in shoes and another that simulates barefoot pedestrians. Consider who will be using your floor if you are thinking about getting it tested.

Many other tests exist for the slip resistance of flooring but few of them provide useful information. Some of those that do are limited to laboratory testing making them inappropriate for assessing the floors installed in the workplace.

Contamination

As mentioned above, most floors are not slippery when clean and dry; however, floors will often become slippery when contaminated. Consider how floors could become contaminated:

- Does the entrance mat dry people's shoes effectively?
- Do customers spill their drinks?
- Do kitchen staff carry dripping baskets away from fryers?
- Does the roof leak?

Take a few minutes to observe what happens. Prepare a plan for dealing with the source of the contamination, be realistic, and if prevention isn't feasible, assess the suitability of the flooring. Remember that only a very small amount of contamination is needed to make smooth floors slippery.

Pay particular attention to entrances as BS 7953:1999[3] recommends a minimum of 2.1m of matting, however, the WELL Building Standard[4] recommends a minimum of 3m of matting to capture contaminants in low traffic areas, and up to 10m for optimum performance in the highest traffic areas.

The WELL Building Standard, created by the WELL Building Institute, is an international system that measures, monitors and certifies a series of features to promote occupant wellbeing. It investigates seven key concepts: air, water, nourishment, light, fitness, comfort, and mind. It specifically includes advice on how to create a healthy entrance.

The 'Air' concept[5] states that, 'All regularly used entrances to the building that have pedestrian traffic to the exterior should use an entryway system composed of grilles, grates, slots or rollout mats that are at least the width of the entrance and extend 3 m in the primary direction of travel.

Cleaning

If the floor is slippery when wet, then using a wet cleaning process e.g. wet mopping will increase the slip risk until the floor is completely dry again. Do not spread spills on smooth floors, use a paper towel or wet vac to absorb the spill. Prohibit people from using the floor until it dries or dry it thoroughly before people are allowed to walk on it.

Even if the floor isn't slippery when wet, the cleaning process is important as a build-up of dirt can compromise the slip resistance of safety flooring over time. 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.

References

1. Slips Assessment Tool. Available here: SAT - Slips Assessment Tool - Slips and trips - HSE
2. Assessing the slip resistance of flooring. Available here: https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/geis2.htm
3. BS 7953:1999 Entrance flooring systems. Selection, installation and maintenance. Available here: https://knowledge.bsigroup.com/products/entrance-flooring-systems-selection-installation-and-maintenance?version=standard
4. WELL Building Standard. Available here: https://standard.wellcertified.com/well
5. WELL Building Standard, HEALTHY ENTRANCE, available at: https://standard.wellcertified.com/air/healthy-entrance

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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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