



Risk control

Slips, Trips and Falls Toolkit: Cleaning Regimes



In partnership with



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Introduction

Cleaning is normally undertaken for three distinct reasons: maintaining the appearance of a floor; for hygiene purposes; or for safety reasons. Cleaning has a significant role in preventing slips and trips and can help to reduce risk if undertaken correctly. But undertaken incorrectly, cleaning can increase risk. Cleaning should therefore be carefully considered both as a control measure and as a potential source of risk.

Trips

Cleaning is an essential element of good housekeeping, which is essential for eliminating trip hazards. However, much of the equipment used for cleaning has the potential to introduce a trip hazard, so it must be planned carefully. Equipment such as vacuum cleaners and floor polishers often have trailing cables, and these along with other items such as buckets and even warning signs, can present a trip hazard. Minimise the length of trailing cables by plugging in to the nearest socket and keep walkways free of obstructions during the cleaning process.

Slips

If smooth floors become contaminated, they can be very slippery. Cleaning should not be used as the primary means of preventing slips if the contamination can be prevented, but cleaning can help manage the risk.

Even slip resistant flooring can lose its resistancy if dirt is allowed to build up on the surface.

If a floor is slippery when wet, then using a wet cleaning process (for example, mopping) will increase the slip risk until the floor is completely dry. Even a well-wrung mop leaves enough water on a floor to potentially cause someone to slip. Avoid using wet cleaning techniques where it is possible, as often a floor is at its most slippery when it is being cleaned.

Do not spread spills on smooth flooring, just dry them with absorbent material (e.g. paper towels). Keep people off a wet floor and ensure it is completely dry before people are permitted to walk on it.

Think about how and when to undertake cleaning to ensure it effectively removes the contamination and that any risk introduced by the cleaning regime is effectively managed.

Types of Cleaning

People often refer to three distinct types of cleaning:

- **Routine cleaning** – regular, planned cleaning activities to maintain the floor
- **Deep cleaning** – more intensive cleaning used periodically to restore a heavily soiled floor
- **Reactive cleaning** – immediately cleaning up an isolated spill

In terms of floor cleaning and the prevention of slips, aim to adequately remove contamination using reactive and routine cleaning, making deep cleaning unnecessary.

Planning and Management

Make sure that the right tools for the job are available and use them correctly. The tools and techniques needed will depend on the floor surface and the contamination.

Different cleaning techniques may have to be used for reactive and routine cleaning, so consider both. The technique used to clean a floor can be just as important as the chemical selected.

Consult the flooring manufacturer's information for their recommended technique. If cleaning chemicals are used, refer to the manufacturer's information and instructions (safety data sheet) to make sure it is suitable and to establish what equipment (including PPE) is needed for its application and removal. If cleaning machinery is used, ensure the operators are trained to use the machinery correctly.

Consider providing slip resistant footwear to cleaning staff as they will be exposed to the potentially wet floor during the cleaning process. More information on choosing slip resistant footwear can be found in the toolkit element - Footwear. Review how it is intended to prevent other people walking on any smooth floors that get wet during the cleaning process. Barriers are much more effective than warning signs at keeping people off contaminated areas. Cleaning in sections, letting one section dry completely before moving to the next, can keep people off the wet floor whilst allowing access to other parts of the site.

Consider where to store cleaning equipment; it should be easily accessible when needed but secure when not in use. Review the location of water sources, drains and power outlets when planning cleaning regimes.

Cleaning Techniques – Wet Contaminants

Wet contaminants can usually be dried up easily using a paper towel or wet vacuum. Avoid increasing the slip risk by wet mopping and spreading the spill.

Ensure the floor is left dry after cleaning or that access to the floor is prevented until the floor has completely dried.

Cleaning Techniques – Dry Contaminants

Dry contaminants, such as dust, can usually be removed with a vacuum cleaner or microfibre mops, avoiding the need to wet the floor.

Cleaning Techniques – Oil and Grease

A detergent solution will be necessary to successfully remove oil or grease from a floor. The solution must be diluted to the correct concentration. One way to control the concentration of detergent in the solution is to provide a measure and mark the fill level in the bucket. Apply enough solution to remove the grease and allow it time to act on the contamination. Even a minute of contact time with the floor can make a significant difference to the amount of grease removed. Scrubbing can help release contamination from a floor with a very rough surface. A dry mop or wet vacuum should be used to remove as much of the solution as possible. Allowing the solution to air dry will leave the grease and cleaning chemicals on the floor as the water evaporates and is one of the most common mistakes that leads to residues on floors after cleaning.

Good Cleaning Practices

Cleaning activities need to be carefully planned so that they do not put people at risk. Try to undertake cleaning at quiet times (e.g. outside business hours) to minimise disruption and risk. It is important that everyone involved in the cleaning process is suitably trained¹ and are provided with the equipment and time to undertake cleaning effectively.

Cleaning equipment, such as mops, will themselves need to be cleaned and replaced at appropriate intervals to prevent them spreading contamination around. Mop heads can usually be cleaned in a washing machine. The condition of cleaning equipment should be monitored, and it should be cleaned and / or replaced, as necessary.

Cleaning staff must be competent and should be supervised to ensure that they are following the cleaning procedures correctly.

Empowering cleaning staff by emphasising their role in preventing slips can help ensure that cleaning is a task which is undertaken with pride rather than being the least appealing part of someone's job.

Observe the cleaning processes on a regular basis to ensure that the cleaning regimes are being followed. If they are not, do not assume the cleaner is to blame as it may not be possible for them to follow the prescribed cleaning regimes given the equipment, time, or training they have received. If cleaning processes are not being followed, revise them so that they can be followed or make sure cleaning staff understand why they have been asked to clean that way. This reduces the chance of them taking shortcuts that undermine safety.

Beware

It is important to bear in mind that polishing and buffing can make floors more slippery.

References

1. British Institute of Cleaning Science: Training Prospectus. Available here: [Resources](#)

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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.

contact@rmpartners.co.uk



Risk Management Partners

The Walbrook Building
25 Walbrook
London EC4N 8AW

020 7204 1800
rmpartners.co.uk

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