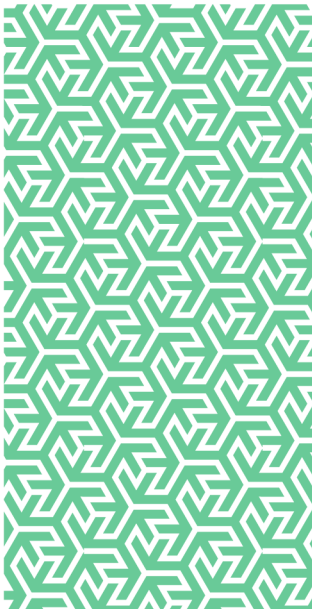


rmp

Risk control
Slips, Trips and Falls
Toolkit: Contamination



In partnership with



Slips, Trips and Falls Toolkit: Contamination

Introduction

The presence of a contaminant (such as water, oil, or dust) can transform a low-risk environment into a highly dangerous one; even very small amounts of contamination can cause an accident.

So, it is important to understand the risk posed by contamination and to take preventative action. Where contamination is difficult to prevent you need to take measures to control the risk of slips on contaminated flooring. Remember, in law, context is everything. Risk assessments help your organisation to consider both commonly present and transient risks and a good starting point is recognising possible surface contaminants.

Surface Contamination

A contaminant is anything that can act as a lubricant between the floor surface and a pedestrian's foot or footwear. The most common workplace contaminants are water or water-based contaminants, but oils, grease and even dry contaminants can make a floor slippery.

Contamination can come from a wide range of sources. Some will be outside of any direct control, such as rain, whereas others, which are associated with a business process, may be easier to control.

Examples of contaminants include:

- Water – rainwater, spilled drinks, bodily fluids
- Oily / greasy – cooking oil, food spills, machinery leaks
- Dry – dust, sawdust, granulated products, or powders.

Not all floors will be slippery when contaminated. There is a wide range of flooring available which is not slippery when contaminated. Shiny smooth floors tend to be slippery when contaminated. Floors will need to be rougher to cope with water-based contamination. Floors will need to be rougher still to cope with oil and grease. Flooring is available which is not slippery even when contaminated with cooking oil.

Identify the Contaminants

Depending on the setting, there are foreseeable contaminants, which should be considered in the assessment of risk. For instance, spillages of food in a kitchen environment; ice in a playground or urine in a care setting.

It is therefore important to systematically identify the contaminants that are likely to be present in the workplace, understand where they come from, consider their influence on slip risk and implement a strategy to control the risk.

Take a few minutes to watch what happens in the workplace and identify what sources of contamination exist. How does it get on the floor?

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999¹ requires an assessment of risk to be completed and the significant findings recorded.

In preparing a risk assessment there may already be an abundance of evidence to suggest the potential for slips and falls such as anecdotal information from employees regarding past accidents or near misses and signs posted saying floors are dangerous when wet.

In relation to a building, the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992² requires that 'every floor in a workplace and the surface of every traffic route in a workplace shall be of a construction such that the floor or surface of the traffic route is suitable for the purpose for which it is used'. It also requires that 'the floor, or surface of the traffic route, shall have no hole or slope, or be uneven or slippery so as, in each case, to expose any person to a risk to his health or safety'. Further, it expects that 'every floor in a workplace and the surface of every traffic route in a workplace shall be kept free from obstructions and from any article or substance which may cause a person to slip, trip or fall'.

While the regulations set out the expectation, how the risks are managed will be dependent on the assessment of the risks and associated contextual factors.

There is also an Approved Code of Practice³ supporting these regulations which can be used to guide any assessment. It states 'surfaces of floors and traffic routes which are likely to get wet or to be subject to spillages should be of a type which does not become unduly slippery. A slip-resistant coating should be applied where necessary'.

The aim of any employer is to try to prevent the contamination of the floor in the first instance. However, in some environments (e.g. public areas) this can be incredibly difficult, so be realistic. If keeping the floor clean at all times is not feasible, think about what else can be done to keep the area safe.

Contamination Prevention

The best control for preventing slips is to prevent contamination getting on to potentially slippery surfaces. A well-designed entrance, incorporating effective drainage, canopies and matting can help to keep external contaminants at bay. For further advice, please see 'Slips Trips Falls Toolkit – Entrances'.

Contaminants associated with a business can sometimes be eliminated by using effective containment. Try to enclose dirty processes as much as possible to prevent contamination of the floor. If this is not feasible, consider using sumps or bunding to prevent the spread of contamination across the floor and onto walkways.

If contaminants are airborne, or otherwise difficult to contain, consider segregating the dirty processes by placing them in a separate room with suitable entrances to prevent the contamination spreading into clean areas. It is also worth thinking about the workflow, as this can also help to minimise the spread of contamination and keep it off busy walkways.

Ask the following questions:

- Can dirty processes be contained or segregated (for example – limiting food preparation to the kitchen area)?
- Can dripping items be moved around in sealed containers to prevent contamination falling onto the floor (for example, using cups with lids)?
- Can the distance dirty items are transported be minimised?
- Could dirty items be moved via a different route to avoid contaminating walkways?

Any preventative measures should save time and money, through less waste, less cleaning and fewer slips.

Risk Mitigation

If floor contamination cannot be prevented, think about how to mitigate the risks. Specifying an appropriate floor finish can help prevent slips. Further advice about selecting suitable floor surfaces is provided in 'Slips, Trips & Falls Toolkit - Slip Resistant Flooring'.

Even slip resistant flooring can lose its performance if contamination is allowed to build up on the surface. It is therefore very important to remove floor surface contamination regularly by implementing a suitable cleaning regime.

Think carefully about how and when to undertake cleaning to ensure it effectively removes the contamination and doesn't introduce further risk. Advice about cleaning is provided in 'Slips Trips Falls Toolkit - Cleaning Regimes'.

Suitable footwear can provide protection against slip accidents where contamination cannot be prevented from getting on the floor. Advice on selecting appropriate footwear is available in 'Slips, Trips & Falls Toolkit – Footwear'. It should be noted that contaminated footwear can spread contamination into clean areas, increasing the slip risk.

Providing boot wash stations at relevant points can help to reduce the spread of contaminants on footwear.

References

1. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Available here: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1999/3242/made>
2. The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992. Available here: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1992/3004/contents/made>
3. Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992. Approved Code of Practice and guidance Available here: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/l24.pdf>

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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

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