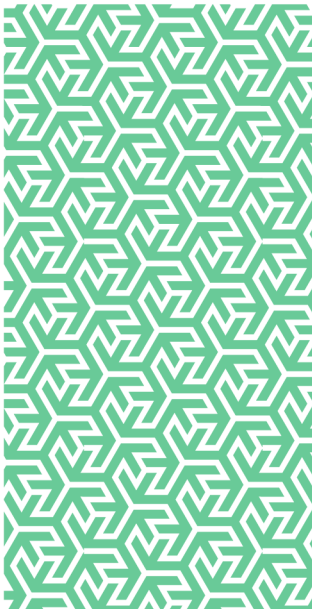


rmp

**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<sup>1</sup>. In one case a care home assistant fell on a wet floor and was awarded £40,000 compensation.

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.

## What is 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 control, such as rain, whereas others, which are associated with a business processes, may be easier to control.

Examples of contaminants include:

- Water – rain water, 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 wet. Shiny smooth floors tend to be slippery when wet and 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 in your Workplace

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 deal with 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<sup>2</sup> 1999 regulation 3 requires an assessment of risk to be completed and the significant findings recorded.

In preparing your 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, Regulation 12 Condition of floors and traffic routes, from the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, 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 you manage the risks will be dependent on your assessment of the risks for your situation in your organisation.

There is also an approved code of practice<sup>3</sup> supporting these regulations to guide your assessment, In paragraph 112 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 and prevent the contamination getting onto the floor in the first place. 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 going to be feasible, think about what else can be done to keep the area safe.

## Prevent Contamination getting on the Floor

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. Advice about designing entrances is provided in Risk Essentials - 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 falling onto 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 falls.

## What to do if you can't keep contamination off the floor

If you can't prevent contamination getting onto the floor, think about how to mitigate the risks. Where contamination cannot be prevented getting on the floor, specifying an appropriate floor finish can help prevent slips. Further advice about selecting suitable floor surfaces is provided in Risk Essentials – Choosing 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 Risk Essentials – 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 Risk Essentials – 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. Susan Ellis v Bristol City Council: Slipping on wet floor. Available here: [05 Jul 2007 \[2007\] EWCA Civ 685, CA](#)
2. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Available here: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1999/3242/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

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

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