



Preventing Work-Related Slips Trips and Falls

Slips, trips and falls ⁽¹⁾ are the largest cause of accidents in all sectors from heavy manufacturing through to office work. In the Member States they have been identified as the main causes of accidents that result in more than 3 days absence from work ⁽²⁾.

Accident risks are higher for those employed in **Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)**, particularly those in enterprises with less than 50 employees. Use of **simple control measures can reduce the risk of injury from slips and trips**. The advice in this factsheet applies to all types and sizes of enterprises.

Employers' responsibilities

Requirements set in European Directives ⁽³⁾ (such as on workplaces, safety signs, personal protective equipment, and Framework for safety) that are relevant to the prevention of slips and trips include:

- Ensuring that, as far as possible, **workplaces** receive sufficient natural **light** and are equipped with artificial lighting adequate to protect workers' safety and health
- Ensuring that **workplace floors** are fixed, stable and level and have no bumps, holes or slopes and are not slippery
- Providing **safety and/or health signs** where hazards can not be avoided or adequately reduced by preventive measures
- Providing **personal protective equipment** (e.g. protective footwear) appropriate for the risks involved and where they can not be avoided by other means. It should be comfortable and well maintained, and not lead to any increase in other risks
- Following a general **Framework** to manage health and safety, including: assessment and prevention of risks; giving priority to collective measures to eliminate risks; providing information and training; and, consulting employees, co-ordination on safety with contractors

The minimum requirements set by Directives have been implemented **in national legislation** that may include additional requirements.

Consulting the workforce is a requirement. Using their knowledge helps to ensure hazards are correctly spotted and workable solutions implemented.

Maintaining a healthy and safe working environment is not only a management responsibility. **Employees** also have duties to co-operate and look after their own and others safety, following instructions in accordance with training given. Everyone should be encouraged to contribute to improving health and safety.

Preventing accidents - Managing the risks

A good health and safety management system prevents accidents by:

- identifying problem areas
- taking decisions and acting on them
- checking that the actions taken have been effective

A typical process involves a number of stages:

Identification of problems and planning

Key areas of risk for slips and trips and falls should be identified - e.g. uneven floors, poorly lit stairs - and targets set for improvement. Equipment should be selected and work practices adopted that enable these hazards to be prevented or controlled.

Organisation

Responsibilities for ensuring safety and health in different work areas should be clearly set out.

Control

Checks are essential to ensure that working practices and processes are being carried out properly. Records should be kept of activities such as cleaning and maintenance work.

Monitor and review

Periodic review is needed. Is the number of accidents reducing? Are fewer potential hazards being identified during safety inspections?

Employers are required to assess the hazards and risks to employees and others (including visitors, contractors and members of the public) who may be affected by their work. Slip and trip risks should be among those examined. The risk assessment should be reviewed and updated regularly, including whenever there are significant changes such as the introduction of new equipment or procedures.

Good working practice

Where possible, the aim should be to **eliminate** risk at source (e.g. levelling uneven floor surfaces). The next preferred option is **substitution** (e.g. using an alternative method of floor cleaning), followed by **separation** (e.g. using barriers to keep workers away from wet floors). The final prevention measure is **protection** (e.g. wearing footwear with non-slip soles). The use of personal protective equipment should be a last form of protection after all organisational and technical measures have been exhausted. There



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⁽¹⁾ Falls refers to "low falls" of less than 2 metres

⁽²⁾ The State of Occupational Safety and Health in the European Union – Pilot Study. 2000. European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. ISBN 92-828-9272-7.

⁽³⁾ <http://europe.osha.eu.int/legislation/> provides links to **EU legislation**, details of Commission guidance for SMEs and on risk assessment and to Member State sites where **national legislation** to implement the Directives and guidelines may be found.

are often simple but effective measures that can be taken to reduce or eliminate slip and trip risks. Preventive actions to consider include:

Good housekeeping - Poor housekeeping and general untidiness are a major cause of slips and trips. Keep the working environment clean and tidy, with floors and access routes kept clear of obstacles. Remove rubbish regularly so it does not build up

Cleaning and maintenance - Regular cleaning and maintenance will minimise risks. Rubbish should be removed regularly and work areas kept clear. Cleaning methods and equipment must be suitable for the surface being treated. During cleaning and maintenance work, take care not to create new slip and trip hazards.

Lighting - Ensure good lighting levels, functioning and position of lights to ensure all floor areas are evenly lit and all potential hazards, e.g. obstructions and spills can be clearly seen. Lighting levels need to allow safe passage through the premises. Exterior lights may be required as outdoor workplaces must be adequately lit.

Flooring - Floors should be checked for damage on a regular basis and maintenance carried out when necessary. Potential slip and trip hazards to look for include holes, cracks, and loose carpets and mats. In any location, the floor surface should be suitable for the work carried out, e.g. it may need to be resistant to oil and chemicals used in production processes. Coating or chemically treating existing floors can improve their slip-resistant properties. It should be kept clean.

Stairways - Many accidents occur on stairways. Handrails, slip resistant covers to steps, high visibility and non-slip marking of the front edges of steps, and sufficient lighting can all help in preventing slips and trips on stairs. Other changes of level such as ramps are often difficult to see. They need to be well marked, with appropriate use of safety signs.

Spillages Clean up spills immediately using an appropriate cleaning method (chemical treatment may be required). Use warning signs where the floor is wet and arrange alternative routes. What caused the spill to occur-can work methods or workplace be changed to minimise spillages?

Obstructions - Where possible, obstructions should be removed to prevent trips occurring. If it is not possible to remove an obstruction then suitable barriers and/or warning notices should be used.

Trailing cables - Place equipment so cables do not cross pedestrian routes. Use cable covers to securely fix cables to surfaces

Footwear - Workers need to have footwear that is suitable for their working environment. Take account of the type of job, floor surface, typical floor conditions and the slip-resistant properties of the soles.

Outdoor workplaces - Outdoor workplaces must be arranged so that risks of slipping and tripping are minimised, e.g. through anti-slip measures in icy conditions and suitable footwear.

Finding solutions - Practical prevention

The case study shows the benefits of taking simple preventive steps. Here it was the accident happening that caused action to be taken.

But enterprises can learn from experiences like this and be pro-active in preventing similar accidents in their premises. **Reductions in the occurrence of slips and trips can often be gained with little or no cost.**

Case study

A worker tripped over a trailing compressed air hose left in an alleyway. The air tube line had not been put away after use. The alleyway was poorly lit and the incident happened at night. Following an investigation the company has installed floodlighting in poorly lit areas and relocated the airline and hose. Safety awareness and housekeeping training is now given to all staff.

Getting more information / References

More information on good safety management practice is available from the *Agency website* <http://osha.eu.int>. All Agency publications can be downloaded free of charge. 'Preventing work-related accidents' is the theme for the European Week for Safety and Health at Work being run by the Member States during October 2001 and more information is given at <http://osha.eu.int/ew2001/>. The Agency site links to *Member State sites* where national legislation and guidance on slips and trips may be found: <http://ie.osha.eu.int/> for Ireland <http://uk.osha.eu.int/> for UK

