



Health and safety factsheet

Slips and Falls

The scale of the problem

Slips and falls are a major cause of workplace injury. More than one thousand serious injuries a month are caused by slips and falls at the workplace; the HSE says this is the cause of one third of serious injuries. In education, the HSE figures show that 55% of all injuries are caused by a slip or a trip. In 2007/8, almost 2000 major injury slip and trip incidents in the education sector were reported to them, 571 of which were to employees, a 5% rise on the previous year.

90% of major accidents resulted in a broken bone causing considerable personal distress and a significant amount of time away from work. When taking action to prevent accidents, there is a tendency to focus on protecting and educating students, but staff and others in educational establishments are equally as important and have a major role to play in preventing slips and trips.

A number of injuries have come to the attention of the UCU health & safety team, where members have slipped and been injured on wet floors, on stairs, and on roads and car parks where snow and ice has not been cleared away.

What the employer must do

The employer has a statutory duty under the Health & Safety at Work Act Section 2 to ensure the workplace is safe and without risk to health, and to maintain it in such condition. Under Regulation 12(2)(a) of the Workplace Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations 1992 they have to ensure 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"***.

Employers should have included surfaces of paths, roads and car parks in their general risk assessments, identifying slip and trip hazards, and the measures they have taken to remove these. Risk assessments must be reviewed following any event that may increase the risk of slipping, such as rain, wet leaves in autumn or below freezing temperatures and snowfalls in winter. The duty on the employer extends to cover anywhere on the employers premises where people walk or pass; that includes any on-site car parks under the employers control and access roads.

Advice, information and action

The HSE promoted a project during 2006-2008 called "Watch your Step in Education" which was aimed particularly at colleges and universities. It included training workshops, inspector visits and information resources. The information is still relevant, and can still be accessed on the HSE website at www.hse.gov.uk/slips/education/index.htm

There is also a current (2009) campaign – "Shattered Lives" – which is concerned with both slips and falls, and working at height: www.hse.gov.uk/shatteredlives/index.htm

More basic information at www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/index.cfm?mins=573 which links to the Hazards at Work manual at www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/slips_trips_and_falls.cfm

There is sufficient information in the chapter to enable reps to develop a checklist for inspection use.

When conducting their quarterly workplace inspections, safety reps should take particular care to examine floor surfaces both inside and outside buildings. Check on the potential for surfaces to become slippery when wet; look for worn or damaged floor coverings; ensure that stair treads are firmly fixed and that handrails are secure. External areas like steps up to entrances, pedestrian pathways, roads and car parking areas are particularly important.

The HSE has published a technical information sheet on assessing the slip resistance of flooring at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/web/slips01.pdf - this provides basic advice for employers on effective testing methods and equipment. If there are concerns about slip resistance of floors, safety reps should ask for tests to be carried out, and problems rectified.

Adverse weather conditions

Snow and freezing temperatures create a serious hazard, and considerably increase the risk of slipping and falling. The employers duty is to ensure the workplace is safe and without risks to either workers or visitors on the site. They must review the risk assessment because conditions have changed, and the risk of slips and falls is much greater than it would otherwise be. They must adopt methods of removing the added risks by clearing snow and ice, and take appropriate action to prevent it becoming slippery again and increasing the risk. The Approved Code of Practice to the Workplace Regulations, Paragraph 96, tells employers that they should make arrangements to minimise risks from snow and ice. This may involve gritting, snow clearing and closure of some routes, particularly outside stairs, ladders and walkways on the roof.

Everywhere that people walk or pass should be treated, paths, roads and including car park surfaces. And it should be done properly and effectively. Always remember that it is the conditions that cause slipping; the fault does not lie with the shoes that people wear.

The guidance for employers on the HSE website is very helpful. It clearly says that employers should have a system in place to manage the conditions, and that car parks need to be included. Advice on the HSE website at www.hse.gov.uk/slips/faq.htm - **icyconditions**

Forward planning

This is a matter that should be kept under review by the safety committee. Where there have been problems, the matter should be raised on the safety committee or JNC to ensure there are clear and unambiguous rules and procedures for snow and ice clearing, and gritting and salting to maintain clear and non-slippery surfaces. Employers should monitor weather forecasts as a means of becoming aware that below freezing temperatures are likely, or that snow may fall, and that precautionary measures are triggered.

Appropriate staff should be appointed and know what action to take. The employer must also ensure that adequate supplies of grit and salt are stored and available when needed.

Employers should also be reminded that injury or damage may be compensatable in the event of an incident or injury. Make sure that you put any complaints in writing, and say what you want to happen. Note any incidents that have been brought to your attention. Keep any responses; confirm any refusal or lack of action in writing. Suggest they ring the HSE Info line - 0845 345 0055 – for more advice about what action to take.