

Preventing slips and trips in kitchens and food service

HSE information sheet

Catering Information Sheet No 6

Introduction

This information sheet was produced by the Hospitality and Catering Industry Liaison Forum, which has members from trade and professional associations, unions and enforcement authorities. Members' associations are free to reproduce and distribute this guidance to catering establishments. The guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive.

This guidance is aimed at employers in the catering industry. Slips and trips are the most common cause of major accidents at work. The costs to the catering industry are substantial, in financial terms and human cost and suffering to those injured.

Civil legal actions brought because of an injury can be extremely damaging to businesses, especially where customers are involved. Insurance covers only a small proportion of the costs. It may not cover the cost of hiring temporary staff and may have an impact on your reputation.

What the law says

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSW Act) requires employers to ensure the health and safety of all employees and anyone who may be affected by their work. This includes taking steps to control slip and trip risks.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 builds on the HSW Act and includes duties on employers to assess risks (including slip and trip risks) and take action to control these risks. The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 require floors to be suitable, in good condition and free from obstructions.

Slips and trips in catering

Slips and trips are a particular problem in catering.

Key messages

- People working in kitchens and food service are more likely to be injured through slips and trips than by anything else.
- The pace of work in this environment can sometimes be intense. This is when accidents are most likely to occur.
- Simple measures reduce kitchen slip and trip accidents and injuries dramatically.

Key points

- Most slip injuries happen on wet floors or floors contaminated with food debris or oil.
- Most trips are due to poor housekeeping.
- Plan ahead to deal with any such problems during busy periods, when the pace of work increases.

Assessing and reducing the risk

The HSE guidance leaflet *Stop slips in kitchens: A good practice guide* includes a table which will help you work out how you can reduce the risk of someone having a slip accident in your kitchen. It asks you to look at your floor, informs you what common slip issues are associated with it and provides you with information on action you can take to prevent slips. The advice on prevention represents examples of good practice. Other methods of slip prevention may be used if they are equally or more effective in your workplace.

Preventing slips

Stop the floor getting wet or contaminated in the first place:

- Maintain equipment to prevent any leaks of oil, water etc.
- Have a system for promptly reporting and dealing with equipment faults.
- Use splashguards or edged work surfaces to contain spillages.

- Use lids and covers for pans and containers, especially when they are being carried.
- Have good extraction and ventilation to remove steam and grease before it can be deposited.
- Use drainage channels and drip trays to carry water, steam drips and waste away from tilting kettles, bratt pans and other equipment.
- Site any 'messy' operations away from walkways and thoroughfares.
- Stop water being walked into the kitchen or service area on people's shoes from outdoors or indoors by providing suitable floor mats.

Put safe systems of work in place:

- Don't allow things to boil over and contaminate the floor.
- Avoid contaminating the floor with dry materials (like plastic bags or flour dust), as they can create a very slippery surface.
- Organise the work to remove or reduce the need for people to rush, to take long strides or to turn sharply.
- Reduce the need for staff to carry, push or pull heavy or bulky loads by providing trolleys, carts or other manual handling aids.
- If staff are carrying items, are their hands free to grasp a handrail to break a fall?

The floor needs to have enough grip

- The floor keeps its grip when wet if it has enough surface roughness. If you don't clean it properly or often enough it loses that grip – good cleaning can bring it back.
- Proper floor surfaces can have enough slip resistance even when wet and oily, and can be cleaned to meet food hygiene requirements.
- If these steps don't deal with the slip risk then you might need to use stick-on anti-slip strips, or surface treatments to improve the slip resistance.
- Make sure that anti-slip strips don't cause new tripping hazards.
- Instruct staff how to use the right cleaning methods and materials for your particular floor surface. Ask the floor manufacturer about the best cleaning method, suitable detergents and the correct concentrations to use when cleaning. The time the detergent is on the floor has been shown to have the biggest effect on cleanliness.

Lay a new floor with better slip resistance

Where it is not possible to improve slip resistance through other means it may become necessary to replace flooring. If this is necessary, bear in mind the following:

- Specify a floor that will meet your needs, including sufficient slip resistance for normal working conditions, ease of cleaning and hygiene.
- If you are considering a particular type of floor, enquire about its suitability for your environment.
- Check that the floor is installed properly and matches your specification.
- When replacing a floor, it is an ideal time to design out any previous hazards that had been controlled by additional measures.

Check that steps, slopes and changes in level are safe

- Changes of level should be easily visible.
- Steps and slopes should always have good grip. Slopes will require a higher degree of grip than level floors.
- Fit a handrail where necessary.

Visibility and distractions can have a big effect on slip and trip risks

- Make sure that places where people walk are properly lit.

Deal with any wet or contaminated floors that do occur

- Clean up spillages **immediately**. This includes spills on any areas on the customer side (if applicable to your business). Don't forget satellite services or self-service areas.
- Don't use cardboard to soak up spillages, deal with them properly.
- Don't leave floors wet after cleaning – clean them to a completely dry finish.
- If 'clean-to-dry' is completely impossible then use barriers and 'wet floor' warning signs to **keep people off the wet area**.
- Use cleaning methods that don't spread the problem. It is often better to deal with small spillages using a paper towel instead of a mop that wets the floor.
- Choose the timing of routine floor cleaning so people are not put at risk and hygiene is not compromised.

Selecting footwear

- Footwear can be important in preventing slips in the workplace and selecting the right shoe sole can have a big effect on reducing slip injuries. As a minimum, there should be a 'sensible shoe' policy in force.
- Different types of footwear can perform differently in different situations. Slip resistance of footwear does not scale with price, some inexpensive shoes can perform very well.
- Rubber soles offer more slip resistance on wet floors than polyurethane soles. But choose footwear after considering the environment, types of contaminants and work being carried out.
- Sole tread patterns make a difference to the slip resistance, finer cleats are better, though they should not become clogged with any waste or debris on the floor. If they do, that design of sole is unsuitable for your situation or you need to control the contamination that gets on the floor.
- If 'anti-slip' footwear is needed to properly control slip risks, the employer has to provide and pay for it.

Preventing trips

Obstructions on the floor and uneven floor surfaces cause most trip injuries. These can be prevented by properly organising the workplace, good housekeeping and good design and maintenance of floors, steps and walkways.

Organise the workplace

- Organise the workspace so everything has a place.
- Arrange any workflows to avoid 'bottlenecks' in the work process.
- A well-organised goods in (or out) system may help, so that deliveries are not placed where they will obstruct where people walk.
- Make sure there is enough storage space for ingredients and equipment in daily use. Again, consider traffic patterns to heavily used items.
- Provide enough waste bins in convenient locations so that packaging, waste etc can be disposed of straight away.
- In large areas, mark out walkways to make it easier to see that they are being kept clear.
- Never allow cables or pipes to trail across the floor.
- Remember to check the customer side of the counter (if applicable to your business).

Good housekeeping

- Don't allow articles to cause obstructions. Avoid putting pans, packages or wrappings on the floor where someone can trip over them.
- Instruct and train staff in good housekeeping practices.
- Periodically inspect the workplace to ensure traffic routes are unobstructed.
- Keep fire routes and exits clear at all times.

Uneven surfaces and changes in level

- Inspect floors for holes, damage or unevenness (such as loose or broken tiles) where someone could trip.
- Highlight any changes in level and steps.
- Make any slopes on walkways gradual and clearly visible.
- Use high-visibility nosing strips on the edges of steps. (Make sure that they are securely fixed and not slippery.)

Other anti-trip measures

- Ensure external areas of the building (such as bin stores and delivery areas) are free from tripping hazards.
- Ensure the workspace is properly lit.
- Ensure external areas, particularly traffic routes, are properly lit, so that obstructions and changes in level are visible.

Getting everyone involved

- Involve employees at all levels when looking at risks and agreeing the safety measures needed. With this approach, you are more likely to successfully tackle the hazard and get employees to comply with any necessary action.
- Consult safety representatives, as they may identify problems or come up with solutions you may not have considered.
- Share the results of your risk assessment with employees.
- Make sure everyone working in an area has a good understanding of the right way to work and the precautions needed.
- Supervise staff to make sure they are following instructions about safe practice.

Training

- Train, inform and supervise staff on important points, such as the significance of spillages, 'cleaning as you go', reporting equipment defects, how to use and care for safety measures (including footwear), the importance of thorough cleaning and drying of floors, and reporting incidents as soon as they happen.

Further information

Slips and Trips eLearning Package (STEP)

STEP is an eLearning package developed by HSE, providing slips and trips guidance through interactive learning. Completing this package will help your understanding of slips and trips, but to reduce accidents you will also need to take action in your workplace.

STEP is a free to use online tool. It sits on the HSE website, at www.hse.gov.uk/slips/step/start.htm.

Further information on slips and trips in kitchens can be obtained from the HSE website at www.hse.gov.uk/slips/kitchens/index.htm.

Other sources of information

HSE catering and hospitality web pages at www.hse.gov.uk/catering/index.htm. The web pages include some useful case studies.

Health and safety made simple: The basics for your business at www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/index.htm

Stop slips in kitchens: A good practice guide Leaflet MISC733C HSE Books 2007 www.hse.gov.uk/slips/kitchens/goodpractice.pdf

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This document contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

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