
	<h1 style="margin: 0;">Safety Advisory/ Guidance Note</h1>				
<b>Ref: SAGN 002:02</b>		<b>RE: Preventing Slips Trips and Falls (STF's)</b>			
<b>Issue date:</b>	July 2015	<b>Revised Date:</b>	December 2019	<b>Review date:</b>	December 2021
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<b>Note:</b>	<i>The information provided is for general guidance only, should you require more specific advice please contact the Health &amp; Safety Help Desk. The management of any occupational safety and health issue(s) remains the responsibility of local management.</i>				

Slips, trips and falls are recorded as **the largest cause of accidents** in all sectors and is the main cause of accidents that result in more than 3 days absence from work – ref. *European Agency for Safety and Health at Work*.

**There were about 1,700 workplace slips, trips and falls reported in 2017, HSA.** The focus of this guidance is on STF's that occur on the same level, however it should be noted that the injury can be more serious if the fall occurs from height.

STF's can result in impacts ranging from embarrassment to fatalities. They account for almost one fifth of all reported accidents in Healthcare and often result in prolonged periods of time off work.

### Risk Assessment:

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 places duties on employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, employee safety, health and welfare while at work. This duty extends to others in the workplaces, who are not their employees, such as service users and visitors.

The risk assessments must be documented in line with existing HSE risk assessment and management procedures. The risk assessments must include any practice concerns and take into account information arising from health and safety audits, risk management data and the legislative and policy frameworks specific to each service.

Managers must ensure that agreed control measures are put in place to eliminate those hazards or reduce the risks as far as reasonably practicable. Control measures should be reviewed periodically to ensure they are satisfactory.

### Hazards (Causes):

The causes of slips, trips and falls may include, but are not limited to:

- Spills
- Wet surfaces
- Damaged flooring
- Changes in level of floors

- Slippery surfaces
- Transition areas e.g. carpeted to tiled floor
- Cables/mats and other floor obstructions
- Overused warning/safety signs
- Environmental cleanliness
- Footwear
- Inadequate/inappropriate lighting

Additional causes can relate to the way in which we work e.g. whilst carrying items and not being able to see forward, loose items on the floor etc.

**Safety Controls: to be considered as part of the risk assessment process.**

Managers must ensure that when undertaking risk assessments that they take into account the hazards identified above that are associated with slips, trips and falls. A good place to start is to identify any areas that have a high potential for slip, trip and fall incidents e.g. kitchens, car parks, bathrooms etc. Please note these examples are non-exhaustive.

Employees also have a key role to play in reducing the number of incidents occurring and should take reasonable care to protect themselves and others and report anything potentially dangerous at work of which they are aware of. They should also ensure they use and take care of any personal protective equipment e.g. slip-resistant footwear

Manufacturers and suppliers also have a responsibility to ensure their products comply with relevant health and safety standards.

Below is a non-comprehensive list of some of the controls to be considered but always remember that where possible the hazard should be eliminated.

**External areas:**

When completing risk assessments ensure that the external areas such as car parks are included. Keep external traffic routes free from potholes or obstructions, pathways and courtyards should be free of algae, moss, leaves etc. In addition a regular inspection and cleaning programme for these areas should be in place including the checking of lighting especially where 24 hour shift work exists.

Whilst awaiting repairs to damaged or unsafe areas ensure suitable barriers are in place that cannot be easily moved as a temporary measure until the repair is completed.

Slips, trips and falls can also occur where there are changes in the level on paths that are not easy to see, e.g. small steps. Improve lighting if necessary; consider applying contrasting eye-catching colour/s to steps (e.g. non-slip paint). On steps and steep slopes hand rails should be provided.

As part of Emergency Planning, severe weather plans must be in place, this may include arrangements such as:

- Clear allocation of responsibility for dealing with snow/ ice on walkways,
- Locating grit/salt bins near where grit/salt is likely to be needed and keeping them properly stocked,
- Gritting and salting of pedestrian routes, e.g. the route from the car park/s to the main entrances.

**Spillages:**

Ensure that there are clear and safe procedures to ensure spills are dealt with immediately. Where a delay is unavoidable, ensure that the internal procedure informs others of the need to be aware of the spill (through warning signs etc.) and that the area is made safe as soon as possible. As wet cleaning can still leave a slip hazard, use absorbent material to soak up the spill when possible. Spill kits must be appropriately located and readily available, some spill kits e.g. blood and chemicals will need to meet specific requirements and additional instruction for employees may be required. In some areas a risk assessment may result in the requirement to supply slip resistant footwear for employees e.g. catering departments etc.

#### **Wet Areas:**

- As part of the hazard identification process wet areas will be identified e.g. bathroom, kitchen, vending machine/water cooler areas. It is also important to consider areas where liquids are stored with the potential to leak.

Some of the control measures to be considered include:

- In bathroom areas check shower curtains/screens to ensure they keep the surrounding areas as dry as possible, position sufficient hand dryers/disposable towels close to sinks, ensure floor drainage is adequate and the floor has adequate slip resistance
- Have any leaks from equipment reported for repair and prevent liquid spreading e.g. drip tray under water coolers taps etc.
- Where appropriate ensure there is adequate local drainage in internal pedestrian areas.
- Use suitable mats to reduce the risk.

#### **Flooring:**

- Choose floors that have adequate slip resistance that are suitable for the work environment and work activities
- Ensure that floors and surface coverings are well maintained and that any safety concerns are reported
- Keep floors and stairways free from obstructions and ensure they are well lit at all times when in use
- Identify areas where levels change, e.g. slopes, ramps, steps/stairs and highlight areas where slopes and narrow steps are located
- Stairs should be provided with easy-to-reach, useable handrails
- Steps should be of equal height and equal depth throughout the flight of stairs
- Nosings (front end of the step) should be in good condition, not slippery and easily visible.

As appropriately identified through the risk assessment process should there be some doubt as to the suitability of the flooring then the floor surface can be scientifically tested to ascertain if floor surfaces need to be replaced or have slip resistant materials added.

One of the most dangerous situations is where pedestrians experience a sudden change in the level of grip (transitional area) e.g. wet to dry and dry to wet, or from one type of floor to another.

A common risk arises in reception lobbies during wet weather it is difficult to stop water entering the building but the following controls should be considered:

- Providing canopies over entrances and improve external drainage, keep doors closed when you can
- Providing umbrella holders at entrances and take precautions to remove excess moisture from footwear by fitting large and absorbent entrance mats that are properly designed, installed, changed as required and maintained

#### **Trailing cables:**

Identify trailing cables and hoses and poorly sited electrical outlets, and as with all tripping hazards eliminate them if possible by:

- Siting electrical outlets to avoid trailing cables
- Position equipment to avoid cables crossing walkways and circulation areas
- Ensure staff are aware of the importance of avoiding trailing cables
- Environmental cleanliness
- Adequate trunking to cover trailing cables where they cannot be avoided.

### **Housekeeping:**

Good housekeeping standards are key when preventing slips trips and falls especially when in busy work environments. Encourage a '**see it, sort it**' mentality among staff at all times and don't leave tidy up until the end of a shift.

- Where possible keep all walkways clear from obstructions, it may be necessary to change the system of work and/or improve the work area layout
- Provide bins and ensure that waste is removed regularly and appropriately
- Provide and maintain adequate storage space and avoid clutter
- Clean floors at quiet times when there is the minimum or no pedestrian traffic
- Wherever possible cordon off the floor area being cleaned using a barrier and organise the cleaning to provide dry paths through/around areas being cleaned
- When wet cleaning, use water at the right temperature and detergent in line with manufacturer's instructions. Remove excess liquid to assist the floor drying process
- Ensure all cleaning staff have received adequate training, instruction and demonstrations and that they wear the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supplied based on risk assessment e.g. slip resistant footwear
- Warning Signs:
  - Warning signs do not physically keep people away from wet floors and slippery surfaces, they do not substitute for necessary protective measures.
- When cleaning floors, use a system that keeps pedestrians away from wet/moist floors, e.g. physical barriers, clean one side of the floor, dry it and then the other thereby allowing a safe, dry area for pedestrians to use
- Warning signs alone may not be adequate for many circumstances and should only be used where hazards cannot be avoided or adequately reduced by other means
- **Warning signs must be removed when they no longer apply.**

**Always consider the use of the premises, its occupancy, the services being supplied and the activity that takes place.**

### **Additional Information:**

Get a Grip Stop Slips & Trips in Healthcare [www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie)

### **Legislation:**

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act (The Act), 2005 Section 8 requires employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the design, provision and maintenance of a safe workplace with safe access/egress.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act (General Application) Regulations, 2007 Chapter 1 of Part 2:Workplace require that floors of rooms shall not have dangerous bumps, holes or slopes and that they be fixed, stable and not slippery.