

Slips, trips and subsequent falls in the workplace can result in injury ranging in severity from the minor to the serious. A slip occurs when stability is lost between footwear and the floor surface and a trip when a person connects with an obstacle in their path and they lose balance.¹

Statistics in Australia show that thousands of people are injured each year due to slip and trip incidents. With injuries mainly including musculoskeletal damage, cuts, fractures and dislocations, and with knees, ankles and backs impacted most frequently.² From these statistics, 56% were reportedly caused by environmental factors such as spills, poor maintenance of walkways, poor lighting and trip hazards.³

The following have been found to contribute to slip and trip incidents:

- ▼ ineffectual floor surface cleaning
- ▼ wet floor surfaces or the use of inherently slippery floor materials
- ▼ uneven or damaged floor surfaces
- ▼ area congestion for example from crowds in public spaces to inadequate storage capacity in workplaces
- ▼ floor transition areas and
- ▼ choice of footwear.

To minimise the risk of slips occurring care should be taken to manage floor cleaning activities to ensure that they are suitable, that no residues are left behind and that signage and restricted access are maintained until the flooring is dry and ready for pedestrian traffic. Throughout the day spills should be immediately identified and promptly and effectively cleaned (as per the floor manufacturer's guidelines and established internal procedures), with areas restricted until they are deemed safe.

Some floor surfaces can be inherently slippery, slip resistance testing as per Australian Standards by a National Association of Testing Authorities, Australia (NATA) accredited laboratory can provide useful information in this regard.

General site maintenance should ensure that lighting is provided at appropriate lux levels (as per Australian Standards) and that surfaces are well maintained with damaged or lifting flooring promptly repaired. Staff awareness and training in hazard identification and workplace safety audits should highlight slip and trip hazards which should be promptly rectified. Furthermore the selection of footwear should be suitable for workplace activities whilst adhering to personal protective equipment and other site requirements.

Adopting measures to minimise the risk of slips and trips should assist in providing a safer workplace for staff, visitors, patrons and contractors.

References:

1. Safe Work Australia, Slips, trips, falls, viewed 30/01/2018 <<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/slips-trips-falls>>
2. ibid
3. ibid



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