

Loss Prevention Standards – Cross Classes

# Prevention of Trips

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**AVIVA**

## Introduction

Slips and trips are the single-largest cause of accidents in both public areas and workplaces. They consistently account for around 30% of all non-fatal injuries reported to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Injuries can be relatively trivial but can cause more serious life changing injuries or even a fatality (HSE accident statistics 2018/2019 recorded 2% of fatalities were due to slips and trips).

It is important that trips are separated from slips as they are caused through different mechanics, i.e. a trip involves a person falling forwards as their foot stops unexpectedly rather than backwards as would normally occur if a person slipped. Common factors that may give rise to a trip include **an object in the person's path or a failure to see an obstacle**. Even small obstacles or changes in level may cause a trip hazard due to the biomechanics of walking where the foot remains close to the ground during normal walking. Toe clearance is therefore an important factor when considering trip hazards.

This document is intended to provide guidance on how to minimise potential personal injury as a result of a trip through good risk management practice.



## Assessing the Risks of Trips

All employers should assess the risk of trips in the workplace, to ensure the safety of employees, visitors, contractors, and other non-employees. Similarly, anyone who is in control of premises needs to manage the risks of tripping. A risk assessment helps you understand what sensible precautions are required to control the hazards in your workplace, for example:

- Specifying appropriate stair/step design for the environment, usage and footfall
- Implementing an effective cleaning regime and inspection system
- Having procedures for attending to spillages and contamination
- Implementing procedures for inclement weather
- Setting lighting and visibility standards

You are probably already doing some of these things to protect your employees and visitors, but a risk assessment should highlight areas where further action is necessary. The risk **assessment process might include a 'heat map'**; plotting all trip incidents by location to identify areas of highest risk, and some of the key hazards to consider are:

- Uneven steps, or steps which are not uniform in dimension
- Poor lighting
- Changes in level
- Slopes
- Uneven flooring
- Inappropriate footwear
- Trailing pipes and cables
- Damaged floor surfaces, both internal and external
- Poor housekeeping
- Vulnerable users

As few workplaces stay the same, it is essential to review what you are doing on an on-going basis.

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## Practical Steps to Prevent Trip Accidents

There are many simple ways to control and prevent accidents in your workplace. Here are a few examples:

### Eliminate trip hazards where possible

- Remove all obstacles in pedestrian walkways where possible
- Reconfigure the work environment and layout where possible
- Fix defects from machinery or buildings which may cause a trip hazard
- Repair pot-holes in car parks or on footpaths
- Design tasks to minimise the need for carrying objects using both hands up or down stairs/steps
- Plan pedestrian and vehicle routes to minimise trip hazards
- Use cordless tools where practicable to eliminate trailing cables

### Stairs and step design

- Use stair design standards, such as [Building Regulations Approved Document K – Protection from falling, collision or impact](#) or [BS 5395-Part 1: Code of practice for the design of stairs with straight flights and winders](#)
- Ensure stair nosings are highlighted using a contrasting colour, ideally rounded slightly to reduce the potential injuries should a fall occur
- Handrails should be:
  - between 900mm and 1000mm above the front edge of each step
  - circular handrails are considered the best (aim for a diameter of 32-50mm) where you can get your hand all the way round
  - at least 50-75mm clearance from nearby walls and objects
  - ideally be of a contrasting colour
  - stairs wider than 2m should be fitted with additional handrails to ensure they can be easily reached

### Use the correct cleaning methods

- Make sure that your cleaning method is effective for the type of floor you have
- Do not introduce more trip risks whilst cleaning is being undertaken
- Leave floors dry after cleaning or exclude pedestrians until the floor is dry
- Remove signage promptly when the floor is dry to avoid creating a new trip hazard
- Have effective arrangements for both routine cleaning and dealing with spills

### Consider the flooring and work environment

- Check for loose, damaged and worn flooring and replace as needed
- Consider trip hazards from carpets or matting
- Make sure lighting is sufficient – levels of at least 200 lux are recommended, avoid glare and shadows, ensure a gradual transition from dark to light areas
- Think about typical spillages and try to ensure the floor surface is a contrasting colour so that they can be seen more easily
- Slopes or steps are clearly visible – use contrasting colours with a light reflectance value (LRV) difference of at least 20 LRV
- Keep walkways and work areas clear of obstructions
- Provide suitable storage and waste disposal facilities
- Consider reducing the need for access platforms over conveyors

## Use the correct footwear

- Where trip hazards remain, e.g. working on a construction site, suitable footwear can help prevent accidents and minimise injury
- Trial footwear first to make sure it is suitable for the environment and for those who will be wearing it, i.e. comfort and fit
- If footwear is supplied as personal protective equipment (PPE), it must be supplied free of charge to employees
- Use the [HSE GRIP Scheme](#) as part of your footwear assessment

## Think about Management and Organisational Factors

Consider how work is organised and managed, e.g. to avoid rushing, overcrowding and trailing cables.

Make sure employees are involved in the decisions that affect them, e.g. choice of PPE footwear or a change in cleaning methods.

Instigate hazard report and defect reporting systems that identify and record trip hazards. Actions should then be implemented in a timely fashion on a priority basis.

## Housekeeping

The HSE estimates that 50% of all trip hazards result from poor housekeeping. Good housekeeping is the most important method of preventing slips, trips and falls. Examples of good housekeeping include:

- Cleaning all spills immediately
- Marking spills and wet areas with appropriate signage
- Mopping spillages or sweeping debris from floors
- Removing obstacles from walkways and always keeping them free of clutter
- Regular monitoring and inspections
- Covering cables that cross walkways
- Keeping walkways well lit
- Promptly replacing broken/defective light bulbs and faulty switches

Without good housekeeping practices, any other preventive measures such as installation of sophisticated flooring, speciality footwear or even training on techniques of walking and safe falling will never be fully effective.

## Records

The keeping of records of specifications, risk assessments, inspections and maintenance, and perhaps most importantly of cleaning procedures may prove decisive in defending compensation claims.

## The Magic ‘Inch’

Organisations often enquire about the extent to which they might be held liable for an accident which results from a trip on an uneven surface. What is the ‘height’ below which a change in level, hole or depression will not render them liable? There is no ‘safe’ limit, no hard and fast rule for when a defect could become a claim. Every claim for compensation will be decided on its own merits and the circumstances that relate to it.

Traditionally, highways engineers tend to have a rule of thumb of 20-25mm (the magic ‘inch’) when assessing for pothole repair needs. In 2016 there was a move towards a more risk-based approach in the Well Managed Highway Infrastructure Code of Practice. This advocated consideration of not just depth but also surface area and location.

For example, a defect of 1 inch may not generate liability if it occurred just prior to the accident and there was no possibility of the property owner detecting it and taking corrective action in time to prevent the fall. However, a small tripping hazard of lesser size may result in a liability if it had been present for an extended period, if its existence was known and it was in a location where people walked regularly.

## Key Action Steps

If you have a responsibility for premises:

- New Surfaces: ensure that new flooring surfaces are free from tripping hazards
- Housekeeping: implement an effective housekeeping regime
- Inspections: conduct routine inspections to ensure surfaces are free from hazards
- Maintenance: ensure that routine maintenance is carried out to remedy defects
- Spills: ensure that spills are identified/reported and cleaned up immediately

## Case Law

There is a wealth of case law, both civil and criminal, relating to trip claims, the following are representative examples. The HSE website contains further information.

- Hays vs. ASDA Stores: customer tripped on projecting fitment in white goods display area. Defendant retailer able to prove that there had been only 3 incidents over a 5-year period and that annual ‘footfall’ for the store was circa 1.4 million. Claimant lost
- Harvey vs. Woolworths (2004): customer slipped on wet floor when entering the store. Defendant retailer able to demonstrate effective system of cleaning, use of warning signs and absorbent mats
- A sunken paving slab in an unlit alleyway resulted in a passer-by falling and fracturing their hip. They received £7,500 in compensation
- Convenience store prosecuted following incident in which a customer tripped on plastic binding used to hold newspapers in bundles. Fine £4,500
- Carpet retailer: found to have poor floor coverings during routine safety inspection. Fined £8,000 for this and other offences

## Checklist

A generic Trips and Falls Checklist is presented in Appendix 1 which can be tailored to your own organisation.

## Specialist Partner Solutions

Aviva Risk Management Solutions can offer access to a wide range of risk management products and services via our network of Specialist Partners who are reputable companies offering agreed discounted rates for Aviva customers.

For more information please visit:

[Aviva Risk Management Solutions – Specialist Partners](#)

## Sources and Useful Links

- HSE – ‘Assessing the slip resistance of flooring, a technical information sheet’
- More information on the above can be found on the [HSE website](#)

## Additional Information

Relevant Loss Prevention Standards include:

- Slip prevention

To find out more, please visit [Aviva Risk Management Solutions](#) or speak to one of our advisors.

Email us at [riskadvice@aviva.com](mailto:riskadvice@aviva.com) or call 0345 366 6666.\*

\*Calls may be recorded and/or monitored for our joint protection.

# Appendix 1- Prevention of Trips Checklist



Location	
Date	
Completed by (name and signature)	

	External	Y/N	Comments
1.	Is there enough lighting provided for employees and visitors to be able to see satisfactorily and avoid trip hazards that might be on the ground?		
2.	Are regular, documented inspections undertaken to identify potential hazards, ensuring that any remedial work identified is implemented?		
3.	Are materials used for external paved areas maintained in good order and do not present a trip hazard?		
4.	Do you discourage individuals from taking shortcuts over uneven ground which are likely to be a trip hazard?		
5.	Are stairs and steps adequately designed, lit and maintained in good order?		
6.	Is any matting supplied securely fixed, and does not present a tripping hazard?		
7.	Is an external cleaning regime in place to minimise obstacles and tripping hazards?		
8.	Do you have a procedure for keeping up to date with the weather forecast, and are you able to respond to the forecast?		

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	External contd.	Y/N	Comments
9.	Do you have winter maintenance procedures in place?		
10.	Do you use salt and grit to remove snow and ice on paths and car parks?		
	Internal	Y/N	Comments
11.	Are regular, documented inspections undertaken to identify potential hazards, ensuring that any remedial work identified is implemented?		
12.	Are entrances, aisles and corridors free from obstructions, having satisfactory lighting?		
13.	Are there any areas with variations in floor level (e.g. slopes, small steps), or changes from one floor material to another?		
14.	Are all floor surfaces in good condition?		
15.	Are stairs/steps in good condition, free from obstruction and provided with handrails and adequate lighting?		
16.	Are there any trip hazards around workstations, e.g. trailing cables or boxes, and has office furniture been arranged so as not to hinder walkways?		
17.	Are documented cleaning schedules in place to ensure surfaces are kept clean and dry?		
18.	Are there procedures to immediately clean up any spillages?		

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	General	Y/N	Comments
19.	Have the results of risk assessments adequately identified trip hazards and are effective control measures implemented.  Are assessments communicated to all relevant individuals?		
20.	Has the provision of appropriate footwear been considered as part of the relevant risk assessment?		
21.	Are employees encouraged to report any issues which they consider to be unsafe?		

22.	Additional comments:
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