



## White Paper

# Considering slips, trips and falls

September 2024



## Considering slips, trips and falls

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Most people are familiar with the concept of a particular day, week or month each year being targeted as a focus for a particular topic or issue, in September alone, for example, we have:

- International Day of Charity on the 5th September;
- International Literacy Day on the 8th September;
- World First Aid Day on the 14th September;
- Ozone Day on the 16th September;
- World Maritime Day on the 26th September; and
- World Tourism Day on the 27th September.

In the UK, over recent years there has also been an initiative for 'Sliptember', with the aim of raising awareness of the impact slips, trips and falls can have on organisations and how we can look to prevent or minimise them. It is also the subject of our whitepaper this month.

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### In this whitepaper:

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## 1. What is a slip, trip or fall?

**Slips** occur where you unintentionally lose your footing and slide/fall. In essence it is a loss of traction between you and the surface you are on caused by too little friction. Most people when slipping tend to fall backwards.

Obvious hazards increasing the likelihood of slips can include, individually or in combination, weather (rain, snow and ice), shiny and wet surfaces or where surfaces have become contaminated due to spills, accumulations or growth of, for example, oil, leaves (or other debris) and moss/algae/lichens.

Additional factors that can increase the risk of slipping include worn or inappropriate footwear, lack of attention to your local environment and rushing/hurrying (again individually or in combination).

**Trips** occur where you stumble/fall having struck an object, typically with your foot or lower leg and where the speed with which you are moving at (momentum) is sufficient for you to lose your balance and fall. Trips usually result in you falling forwards.

Obvious hazards increasing the likelihood of trips can include, individually or in combination, uneven surfaces and obstacles and obstructions. Lack of attention of your local environment and rushing/hurrying can increase the risk of your tripping.

**Falls** (on the same level) occur where you lose your balance and gravity takes over causing you drop either onto the floor, anything adjacent to you or usually both. For the purposes of this article, they are differentiated from falls from height, which while all the factors above contribute to a fall, they and their management/control from a health and safety perspective is distinct.

NHS inform identifies "falls are usually caused by an interaction of a number of risk factors. The more risk factors you have, the greater your risk of falling. Falls prevention is about recognising, and where possible, taking action to reduce the risk." Much of this relates to your physical or health condition and include:

- Weak muscles, especially in the legs;
- Poor balance, causing unsteadiness on your feet;
- Dizziness or light-headedness;
- Black outs, fainting or loss of consciousness;
- Foot problems – including pain and deformities;
- Memory loss, confusion or difficulties with thinking or problem solving;
- Vision and hearing problems;
- Taking medication that makes you dizzy or drowsy;
- Drinking too much alcohol, especially with medication; and
- Some bladder or bowel conditions.

[Falls - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)



## 2. Why are slips, trips and falls such an issue?

Mention slips, trips and falls to most people (including employers) and they do not see it as a big issue in the overall scope of things.

However, as they have been for some considerable time, slips, trips and falls (on the same level) are the single biggest cause of workplace injury according to published Health and Safety Executive (HSE) statistics - Non-fatal injuries to employees by most common accident kinds (as reported by employers) (2022/23), put slips, trips and falls (32%) at the top of the list, which was also more than the second and third placed non-fatal injuries (handling, lifting or carrying (17%) and struck by moving object (11%)) combined.

The HSE go on to identify, slips and trips as “the most common cause of major injuries at work” and “95% of major slips result in broken bones”. Therefore, they are responsible for, on average:

- Over a third of all reported major injuries;
- 20% of over-3-day injuries to employees;
- 2 fatalities per year;
- 50% of all reported accidents to members of the public that happen in workplaces;
- Cost to employers £512 million per year (lost production and other costs);
- Cost to health service £133 million per year; and
- More major injuries in manufacturing and in the service sectors than any other cause.

### Why does it matter - Slips and trips - HSE

It may not be by accident either that when doing an internet search on ‘slips and trips’ a site to ‘make a claim’ is never far from the top of the list.



### 3. What does the law say about slips trips and falls?

The general duties of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, state, "It shall be the duty of every employer:

- To ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all his employees" (Section 2(1)); and
- To conduct his undertaking in such a way as to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that persons not in his employment who may be affected thereby are not thereby exposed to risks to their health or safety" (Section 3(1))".

Additionally, under Section 7(1), General duties of employees at work

"It shall be the duty of every employee while at work:

- (a) to take reasonable care for the health and safety of himself and of other persons who may be affected by his acts or omissions at work; and
- (b) as regards any duty or requirement imposed on his employer or any other person by or under any of the relevant statutory provisions, to co-operate with him so far as is necessary to enable that duty or requirement to be performed or complied with."

Section 8(1) states "No person shall intentionally or recklessly interfere with or misuse anything provided in the interests of health, safety or welfare".

This would include the need to manage the risk of slips and trips, as well control slip and trip risks from both an employer and employee's perspective.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, regulates the need for risk assessment and arrangements as well as having competent support and training (Regulations 3, 5, 7 and 13 respectively), putting in place the framework as to how employers should assess and manage health and safety risk, including that of slips and trips.



More specifically, the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, states:

### **Regulation 9 - Cleanliness and waste materials**

- (1) Every workplace and the furniture, furnishings and fittings therein shall be kept sufficiently clean.
- (2) The surfaces of the floors, walls and ceilings of all workplaces inside buildings shall be capable of being kept sufficiently clean.
- (3) So far as is reasonably practicable, waste materials shall not be allowed to accumulate in a workplace except in suitable receptacles.

### **Regulation 12 - Condition of floors and traffic routes**

- (1) Every floor in a workplace and the surface of every traffic route in a workplace shall be of a construction such that the floor or surface of the traffic route is suitable for the purpose for which it is used.
- (2) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the requirements in that paragraph shall include requirements that:
  - (a) 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; and
  - (b) every such floor shall have effective means of drainage where necessary.
- (3) So far as is reasonably practicable, every floor in a workplace and the surface of every traffic route in a workplace shall be kept free from obstructions and from any article or substance which may cause a person to slip, trip or fall.





## 4. What can I do to manage the slip, trip and fall risk in my organisation?

Actively looking to reduce the risk of slips trips and falls for your employees is not only very good for them, but also for the organisation. Further good news is that, in most cases, controlling the risks is relatively easy with some thought and application to your workplace and workstyle.

The HSE provide a wealth of information on how you can manage your slip trip and fall risk, covering risk assessment, slip and trip potential models and INDG 225, a brief guide on preventing slips and trips at work. Links to this information can be found below.

[Employers - Risk assessment - Slips and trips - HSE](#)

[Causes and prevention - Slips and trips - HSE](#)

[Preventing slips and trips at work INDG 225 \(rev1\) \(PDF\)](#)

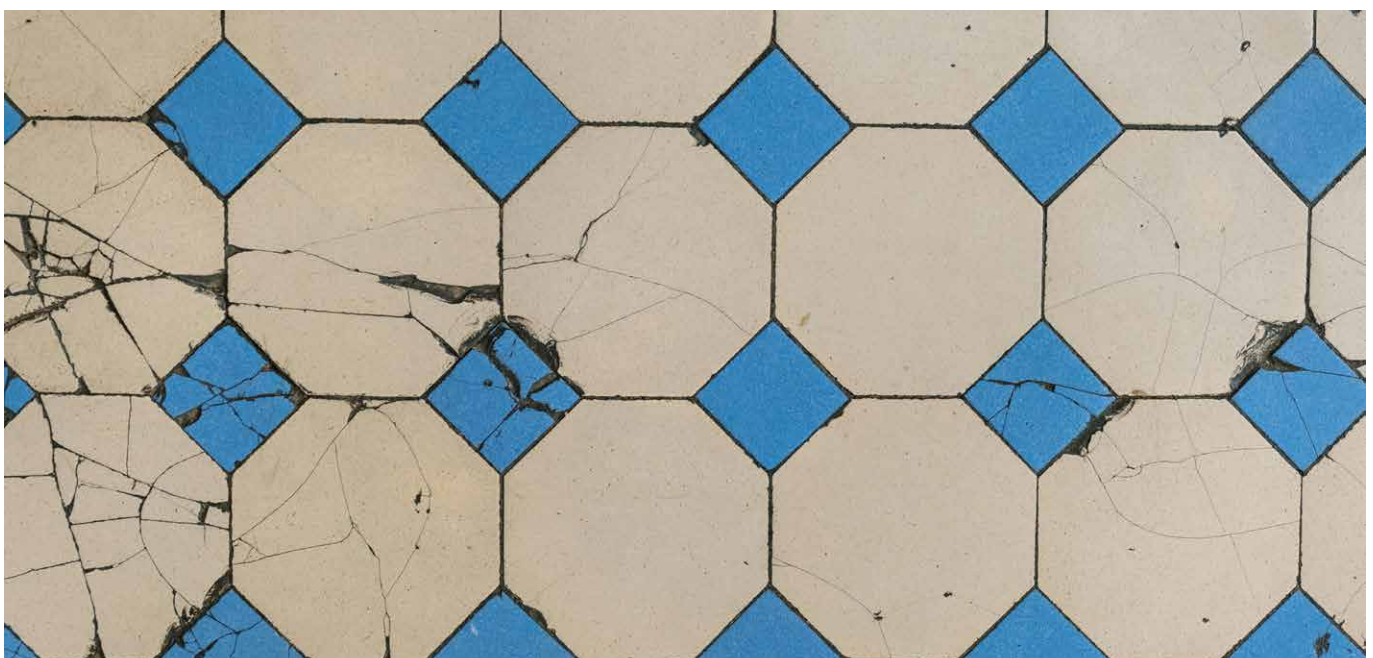
Some practical advice and tips when considering your slip, trip and fall management are:

### Management

- Properly risk assess and design your workplace and work activities accordingly.
- Assess any PPE needs you may have and what levels information, instruction, training and supervision you need to provide for your people.
- Review your work areas and check the specification of flooring is appropriate for the tasks being performed and all equipment used is properly maintained.

### Good housekeeping

- Keep your walkways free of obstacles and repair/replace worn or damaged flooring, nosings etc.
- Keep your floor surfaces clean, use the right cleaning materials and methods for them and make sure any hard surfaces are dry when you're finished.
- Have procedures in place for quickly identifying and dealing with any spills or contamination that might occur.



## Weather

- Particularly when wet or frosty the risk of slips, trips and falls increase.
- Consider the types of flooring you have and whether, additional matting, cleaning or gritting is needed for entrances and relevant external areas respectively.

## Environment

- Make sure your people recognise any additional risks that may arise from where they are working (uneven surfaces, hidden hazards (e.g. holes) and additional obstacles).
- Particularly outdoors and on construction sites appropriate footwear is essential and make sure it is being checked, old, worn and ill-fitting footwear can be a hazard.
- Again, consider how different weather conditions can influence the activities being carried out and the risk of slips and trips (rain, ice, snow).

The HSE also provide a hazard spotting checklist for slips and trips which can be found at - [Slips and trips: Hazard spotting checklist \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/Slips%20and%20trips%20-%20Hazard%20spotting%20checklist)



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Call us on  
+44 (0)1403 269375



Email us at  
[info@assurityconsulting.co.uk](mailto:info@assurityconsulting.co.uk)



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