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Implementing a slip and fall prevention program

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Controlling Losses – Implementing a Slip and Fall Prevention Program

By **Brandon O'Dell**

All over the country and the world, owners and managers are asking themselves, “What can we do better? What separates us from the really profitable companies?” Operators want to know what the most successful companies do different that makes them consistently profitable and spurs growth. The answer? Profitable operators understand that success requires a plan for absolutely everything in their operation. They have effective programs to control losses and increase revenue in all areas. They don't just concentrate on the “big two”, labor and product cost, there is a plan for everything. This article addresses an often overlooked area in many restaurants, slip prevention.

According to the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE), slip and fall accidents are the second leading cause of on-the-job deaths, second only to automobile accidents. The U.S. Department of Labor states that 15% of workplace deaths are caused by slips, trips and falls. The ASSE, whose building codes are adopted as law in most cities and states across the country, recently released a new American National Standard which focuses on reducing slip and fall accidents in the workplace. Up to 9 million disabling slip and fall accidents each year, that's 25,000 per day, are attributed to slip and fall accidents by the National Safety Council. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) both mandate that walk surfaces should be slip resistant. With the high amount of expedient walking and ever changing and even wet conditions, restaurants become a high risk environment for slip and fall accidents. What should a restaurant owner or manager do to limit the restaurant's liabilities?

Implementing an effective slip and fall prevention program is a restaurants best defense against getting caught with high workers compensation insurance, liability insurance, ADA or OSHA fines, or a lawsuit. There are five key areas to an effective slip and fall prevention program. Though concentrating on any one area can reduce risks, using a complete program that addresses all the areas is the only way to ensure a successful program. Here are the five areas your program should address:

1. **Flooring surface** – This is the foundation to a slip prevention program. The more dangerous the environment around the surface, the more slip resistant the actual surface itself should be. Slip resistance is measured by a ratio called the *coefficient of friction*. There are numerous devices used to measure the coefficient of friction of a

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2. **Proper cleaning methods** – Without the use of proper cleaning methods, even the most slip resistant surface can become slippery. Food particles, dirt, grease and other cleaning agents all build up and fill in the tread patterns on a floor. Without the use of proper cleaning methods. Once the tread is filled in, there is nothing left to create friction against a shoe. The three biggest cleaning mistakes made by restaurants include 1) using a mop as the primary cleaning tool, 2) mixing a high concentration of soap or degreaser into the cleaning solution and 3) not having a rinsing cycle for the floor to remove soaps and degreasers. Ideally, restaurants should use the same type of cleaning method other high risk businesses, such as butcher shops, are required by law to use.

A proper floor cleaning starts with applying a correctly diluted degreaser or cleaner. A higher degreaser ratio is needed for more contaminated floors, lower for less contaminated floors. Most systems that mix chemicals automatically dispense at a ratio only correct for the greasiest of floors. Entry ways, for example, require a low concentration of cleaner while kitchens require a higher concentration. By applying cleaners with a pump sprayer, instead of a mop and bucket, and properly mixing cleaners, operations can save a significant amount of money on chemicals by not wasting. The use of pump sprayers also reduces the spreading around of grease from one area to another.

Next, the floor should be scrubbed with a deck brush. Mops do not move into the pores and crevices of a floor to break out buildup, deck brushes do.

After scrubbing the floor, the contaminants and cleaner have to be removed. They are removed through squeegeeing into a drain, or into an area with a wet/dry vacuum if floor drains are not present. Mopping alone does not pick up the majority of the contaminants. Mops only push the contaminants around. They end up in the pores they were just removed from.

Lastly, a floor needs to be rinsed with hot, clean water. Ideally, the restaurant is equipped with floor drains and equipment and product is organized to allow for the used of a hose and squeegee rinsing. If this is not possible, using hot clean water in a clean mop bucket and a clean, uncontaminated mop head will suffice. Simply wetting, wringing often and mopping over the surface will provide for the best rinse possible without a hose.

Low traffic and low contamination areas may not be required to be cleaned in this method on a daily basis if a regular weekly proper cleaning is administered to avoid buildup.

Another cleaning option that should be considered in addition to the above proper cleaning method, or to help work around a restaurant with cleaning challenges, is monthly restoration cleanings. Very strong cleaners are available from restoration product companies or mainline suppliers that, when used once a month, can strip your floor of any buildup that may be effecting the surface.

A trend in chemical companies recently has been to offer floor cleaners that leave a polymer buildup on floors to create “tread”. While some may help less porous floors with a small amount of preexisting tread, they often serve to fill in pores and tread on more porous floors. In a dry condition, the slip resistance is slightly improved, but the polymer buildup over the pores may serve to make the floor more dangerous wet instead of safer. In any case, proper cleaning procedures and permanently changing the surface itself are much more effective and less expensive in the long run.

Proper cleaning procedures should be part of every employee’s training. Most

employees come from one of the estimated 90% of operations that do not use proper cleaning methods.

3. **Surface evaluation and documentation** – Measuring the coefficient of friction of your walkways and keeping a record of the readings not only gives you a measuring stick to help you gauge the success of your slip and fall prevention program, it also provides up to date accurate data on the condition of floors and documents the operations efforts to comply with ADA and OSHA requirements in addition to court recognized minimum slip resistance. In the big picture, this step could possibly save the operation more money than all other steps combined.
4. **Footwear** – Slip resistant footwear has increasingly become a tool for slip prevention. Many shoe manufacturers now make slip resistant footwear specifically designed for wet or oily conditions. While requiring slip resistant shoes to be worn in an operation is a necessary step in slip and fall prevention, the use of shoes alone does not constitute an effective slip and fall prevention program.
5. **Hazard Warnings** – Proper signage and its' correct use is the final ingredient to a slip and fall prevention program. The use of signage alone does not release an operation from liability in the event of an accident. Too often, operations do not remove signs after floors have dried. Employees and patrons become complacent when approaching areas with wet floor signs because, more often than not, they are no longer wet. Many operations buy two sided wet floor signs that cannot be read from the sides. Four sided wet floor signs should always be used. Improper use of signage and/or the use of ineffective signs could be the deciding factor of liability in a slip and fall lawsuit.

The benefits of implementing a good slip and fall prevention program are numerous. Some, such as the added protection against lawsuits are immeasurable. Evidence of compliance to ADA and OSHA requirements and court recognized minimum standards of slip resistance can help protect you from not only law suits, but also fines that can be levied by the ADA and OSHA. While neither organization recognizes a ratio of minimum slip resistance because they cannot agree on a method to measure it, both do require all walkways to be slip resistant. Without an absolute ratio to measure compliance, the determination of compliance is left to the opinion of the inspector.

Lowered worker compensation insurance and liability insurance are a definite benefit of a good slip and fall prevention program. Decreasing the likelihood of a fall helps to decrease the number of accidents, in turn helping to hold down or even reduce insurance premiums. The implementation of a solid plan alone may be enough for an insurance company to offer a discount.

Increased employee productivity is another benefit that is hard to measure, but absolutely present. Sure footing increases the speed of an employee's gait. Employees work faster when they walk faster. They get more accomplished in a shorter period of time. The added confidence and reduced stress affecting employees with a safe surface to walk on can improve every aspect of their work, including their attitude.

Another hard to measure benefit of a good slip and fall prevention program is the psychological effect a safe walking surface and sure footing may have on your customers. Elderly customers often avoid restaurants with floors they consider slippery. A slip and fall accident to an elderly customer could mean surgery or even death. Not a good payoff for the risk of going to a restaurant that serves their favorite hamburger. Families with children just learning to walk may avoid restaurants with unsafe surfaces. Lack of sure footing and slip resistant surfaces are factors customers just can't put their finger on when they attempt to explain why they do not eat at a certain establishment. Their decision is often made subconsciously as a protective reflex.

As a contributing factor to loss prevention and even increasing revenue, implementing a proper slip and fall

safety program can help a restaurant take one step closer to the profitability owners and operators see in other restaurants. Take one more step toward becoming a professionally organized and managed operation idolized by others. Have a plan for everything, including slip and fall prevention, and reap the benefits.

Brandon O'Dell
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4 RESPONSES TO IMPLEMENTING A SLIP AND FALL PREVENTION PROGRAM

Bob Beck | February 16, 2008 at 10:29 pm | [Reply](#)



Brandon,

Great article, I have been in the manufacturing and selling of cleaning product that pay direct attention to reducing slip and falls in the work place for employees and more importantly for the consumer for 10 years. Even with the great products and equipment we have it still comes down to "You have to inspect what you expect" When management got involved and creates a plan and inspect what it expects allot of gross profit dollars stay in the bank. I had a group of 13 restaurants reduce there slip and fall accidents from 84 two years ago to 4 last year. They made the decision to invest in creating a plan, purchasing the recommended product, training staff and inspecting what they were expecting...Now there is a \$3,000.00 budget that manager uses when he catches an employee doing what he expect from them .

bodellconsulting | February 16, 2008 at 11:24 pm | [Reply](#)



Thanks Bob. I'm familiar with a lot of products that microscopically etch floors and create traction to increase the coefficient of friction on floors. They're pretty low cost. I've always found it interesting that restaurants traditionally accept slippery floors as a risk of doing business, when the solutions can be as easy as better cleaning methods or using an inexpensive treatment to change the surface.

[Mike Steely](#) | February 18, 2008 at 3:28 pm | [Reply](#)



Brandon,

I too enjoyed your article and feel that proper long-term care makes all the difference in the world. My company manufactures Safe Solution, one of the micro-etching products you referenced. While a highly effective product on its own (we share similar 90% + results that Bob mentioned above) without the commitment from the restaurant owners and management for a truly long-term program for safety results can degrade over time. Our solution for this is to take an active role in their employee education and floor measurements ourselves as part of what we call our Floor Safety Maintenance Program. This is something we instituted about a decade ago and is now becoming an industry standard.

We have found that over time, even with proper planning regarding safety at the time of the initial floor treatment that dynamics can change. Floor traffic patterns change as the interior design may be modified, menus in a restaurant may change which cause grease levels and other food and beverage substances to cause coefficient of friction changes. Also, neighborhood demographics change resulting in a change in the type of patron with differing floor stability requirements as you noted above.

From our experience, the absolute most critical step comes down to on-going planning and communications between all parties involved in floor safety and maintenance, including one that is often overlooked, the employees working and cleaning the floors on a daily basis.

[bodellconsulting](#) | February 23, 2008 at 6:28 am | [Reply](#)



Good point Mike. I recommend to restaurants to keep a log of measurements of their slip coefficient in commonly wet areas of their business. A good log of measurements not only alerts the business if their surface is wearing smooth or isn't getting properly cleaned, but it also protects the business against lawsuits, as a suit against them will have to prove negligence to win.

One important fact I didn't mention in my article, is that the ADA can even view slip prevention treatments as "barrier removal" in areas where disabled persons may be walking. This qualifies the cost of treating that area to be taken as a tax credit.