



# Housekeeping

by Doug Scouten

## Do not overlook the need to properly maintain anti-slip floors

*Another great article from The Rooms Chronicle, the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! \*\*\*Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.\*\*\* College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com*

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There is more than beauty at stake in maintaining the flooring of a hotel. While cleanliness and visual appeal are certainly critical attributes of a well managed lodging property, equally or even more important is the safety of guests and employees.

### Legal considerations

One important responsibility of a property's management that is often overlooked is to maintain safe, non-slippery floors. According to tort law basics, a hotel's owner and management are legally responsible for providing to all persons safe underfoot surfaces that do not present harm or pose a foreseeable threat or imminent danger. Failure to provide safe floor surfaces, to safeguard against or warn passersby of such potential dangers, or to remedy unsafe flooring situations, will inevitably land the owner and/or management in the defendant's chair of a slip-and-fall lawsuit.

Defense costs can be enormous, and settlement costs even more astronomical, not to mention the potential bad publicity and added stress and time associated with defending or settling such a personal injury claim. In recent years, many states have shifted the burden of proof away from the injured plaintiff and onto the shoulders of the defendant. Nowadays, if a guest slips and falls, it is the hotel's responsibility to prove that it exercised "reasonable care" to keep its floors clean, dry, and not slippery. And since nearly all personal injury attorneys accept plaintiffs' cases on a contingency basis, there is no lack of lawyers who will seek to pursue even the most questionable or borderline claims.

According to the National Floor Safety Institute, 50% of all slip-and-fall accidents are caused by improperly constructed or maintained flooring surfaces. Interestingly, an additional 10% are the result of fraud. In 2001, the average slip-and-fall claim nationwide was for \$3,900, while the cost to litigate the lawsuit had reached \$100,000, according to Russ Kendzior, executive director of the institute.

### Slip resistance

There are many organizations concerned with the safety of surfaces for foot traffic in public areas. These include government, legal, union and consumer groups. The main standards used to establish how slippery floors can be are set by the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) and ASTM International (formerly known as the American Society of Testing and Materials). Both of these independent organizations conduct tests on floor cov-

### The Complaint Corner

- Ms. Cranky:** (...to front desk clerk, in the early evening...) My husband and I would like to go out for a nice quiet dinner outside of the hotel tonight. Can you steer us in the right direction?
- Bad Reply:** Here is the local phone directory. If you look in the yellow pages under 'restaurants' I am sure that you will find something suitable.
- Slightly Better:** I would suggest Natalie's Brasserie; they have the best zucchini casserole. You are a vegetarian like me, right?
- Best Reply:** What kind of cuisine were you and your husband looking to enjoy, Ms. Frumpy? Perhaps you would like to review our off-property dining directory? It contains pictures and menus from an extensive number of local restaurants. I would be happy to check availability or make a reservation for you at the restaurant of your choice.

ering materials, floor treatment materials, and walkway construction materials to determine the hazards that each may pose, and define and publish standards with relation to the safety slip resistance of such materials.

The specific term 'static coefficient of friction' (SCOF) is used in measuring and describing the actual slip resistance of a floor surface. SCOF reflects the amount of force needed to keep contact between a standard weight and a given surface. The higher the SCOF, the rougher the floor surface and the less slippery it is. The SCOF can sometimes be too low (not enough friction) which will likely lead to a greater number of slip-and-fall accidents. Conversely, too high of a SCOF (too much friction) is a possible indicator of a potential tripping hazard.

There is an optimum range for how slip resistant a flooring surface should be. UL has established the safety standards, which are outlined in their technical bulletin [UL 410: Slip Resistance of Floor Surface Materials](#). Flooring materials and floor coatings are submitted for testing to UL by the manufacturer of the product to determine the static coefficient of friction. They are then tested in a UL lab under very stringent conditions using a device called the James Machine. The optimal range of SCOF as established by UL is from 0.5 to .59. The Americans with Disabilities Act standards for slip resistance recommends at least a SCOF of 0.6 for level floors and 0.8 for ramps. The UL determined SCOF for flooring material and floor coatings can be obtained from the manufacturer or product specification sheet. However, the individual property's maintenance and application regime may alter the SCOF outside of a laboratory environment.

Nevertheless, such laboratory testing is clearly not practical for existing facilities. While it is possible to measure the slip resistance of floors by using a portable device called a tribometer, these devices can cost thousands of dollars and require a highly skilled operator. One other drawback is that these machines cannot evaluate the cause of a problem; this involves human judgment.

Since regulations do not require the precise measurement of the static coefficient of friction of floor surfaces, most facilities opt for a different approach. They rely on the subjective evaluation and vigilance of an experienced housekeeping staff. This means that it is the responsibility of the housekeeping manager to establish a regular floor care maintenance program that includes continual monitoring of floor surfaces for possible trouble spots and educating staff members.

### **Anti-slip options**

There are several steps that can be taken and products available to ensure safe anti-slip floors. Ideally, when a building is being constructed or renovated, floors can be designed with materials that have slip resistant characteristics. One example would be rubber tile floors. Once a building has been built, managers then need to examine post-construction treatments to include chemical solutions, anti-slip tapes and pads, and rubber mats.

### **Anti-slip chemical treatments**

When it comes to concrete, nylon or stone type floors, these can be coated with commercial anti-slip chemicals. These chemicals are available from the local janitorial supply house or chemical vendor and come in both permanent and renewable treatments. These chemicals are produced by many different manufacturers, such as The Bullen Companies, Johnson's, and Core Products Company Inc., to name a few. These floor coatings are typically applied with a mop and bucket for local treatments or auto scrubbers for larger areas. On ceramic or stone-tiled floors, such as those found in commercial kitchens, there are chemicals that can be used to leach out the built-up grease that fills the pores in the floor tiles and return them to their natural anti-slip state.

### **Anti-slip tape or pads**

For floors that will see considerable wetness or grease in normal use, anti-slip tape or pads can be applied to the floor to increase slip resistance (this is similar to the idea of using rubber strips or a mat in a bathtub or shower). These are used in areas such as indoor-outdoor entryways, shower rooms and pool areas, as well as kitchens, stairwells, and smooth, graduated inclines such as handicap access ramps. These products are produced by 3M, ULINE and others. One other step that should be taken is to keep these floors as dry as possible by keeping a wet/dry vacuum cleaner available to quickly pick up standing water.

## **Throw rugs or mats**

Rubber-based walk mats or rubber-back throw mats should be considered for areas that receive extensive foot traffic and are subject to high degrees of moisture. Perforated rubber mats are ideal for back-of-the-house areas such as a kitchen's stewarding or food preparation line. The perforated mats allow moisture to drain underneath the mat while providing assured footing. Generally, these mats will need to be cleaned on a daily basis.

Rubber-backed throw mats, sometimes referred to as walk-off mats, should be located inside and outside of each entrance to the hotel. These mats, which come in varying colors and designs, and may be customized with graphics, are intended to reduce the tracking of dirt, moisture and other contaminants into the hotel. Use of these mats is critical at entrances during inclement weather where rain and snow can be brought indoors to create puddles of water and potentials slip-and-fall hazards.

## **Constant monitoring and common sense**

The most important step a hotelier can undertake to properly maintain flooring surfaces and to eliminate potential slip-and-fall hazards is to use a common sense approach. Realize how slippery the various flooring substrates in a hotel can be and take the appropriate steps to assure a safe-footed environment. While highly polished marble looks beautiful in the hotel lobby, walking on it is like skating on ice after moisture has been introduced into the equation. Keep the surface clean and dry and consider forgoing the polish and wax.

Constantly monitor for the accumulation of moisture and foreign debris at all entrances and mop/sweep up all puddles or slippery debris in a timely manner. During inclement weather, it is not unreasonable to check entranceways every 15 minutes! Don't forget to place out plenty of "wet floor" signs to warn of potentially slippery conditions.

Take immediate action to clean up any spills or puddles when they are first reported or sighted. In a lawsuit, any delay in cleaning up the area will be perceived as an act of negligence or indifference. Cover a spill or puddle area with a wet floor sign or piece of furniture until a mop can be retrieved.

Require all hotel employees to wear non-skid rubber-soled shoes, especially the culinary, stewarding, receiving, housekeeping and laundry staff. Finally, educate all staff about the costs and ramifications of slip-and-fall accidents. Remind them that it not only costs the hotel money in terms of lawsuits and injury settlements, but will likely make the hotel less able to provide competitive wages and benefits to its employees. ✧

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