



Risk Management

by Jesse Denton

Ten slip, trip and fall prevention considerations for hotel managers

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In the hospitality industry injuries from slipping, tripping and/or falling (STF) are historically one of the top two types of employee injuries. These incidents may result in serious injury to the employee and can be very expensive to the employer. They are frequently preventable if good loss prevention practices are followed.

There are many contributing factors that may lead to the employee sustaining an injury from a slip, trip or fall. The list below includes some of the most common contributing factors:

- Walking Surface Coefficient of Friction
- Foreign Substance Potential
- Surface Condition
- Changes in Surface Materials
- Level Changes
- Obstructions
- Visibility
- Stairs
- Human Factors
- Distraction

Some of these factors can be readily affected by the employees at a hotel or restaurant, (i.e., foreign substances, visibility) others are beyond the control of the staff, (level changes, surface changes, and human factors.) While it is important to be aware of all factors which affect the ability of employees and guests to walk safely, hotel managers should spend the majority of their time on factors they can change without a major renovation. Let's review what is easily done and what is not.

1. Walking surface coefficient of friction

Coefficient of Friction (COF) is a measurement of the slipperiness of a surface. The lower the number the more slippery the surface; a COF of 1.0 is the equivalent of rough sandpaper; a COF of 0.0 is approximately the same as water on ice. Most codes and the ADA specify a COF of 0.50. We all know carpet is more slip resistant than granite; pool decks are more slip resistant than restroom tile. Solutions are not always easy. It is not easy to replace floor covering; however, there are treatments which can be applied either by the hotel staff or by vendors that will improve the slip resistance of granite, marble, hardwood and similar resilient surfaces.

2. Surface condition

Broken ceramic tile, ripped carpet seams, parking lot potholes and similar conditions not only have a negative impact on the appearance of a hotel's property, they also present a safety hazard. Temporary measures should be taken to reduce the hazard until permanent repairs or replacement can be completed. A warning cone or tape on

HAZARDS

See it → Be vigilant

Assess it → Exposure levels

Fix It

Evaluate it → Is FIX successful?

Review It → Effectiveness over time

carpet looks better than a guest or employee tripping on it. Take ownership, report and/or repair damaged walking surfaces.

3. Foreign substance potential

Self-serve buffets or salad bars, swimming pool and spas maximize this concern. While most people expect pool decks to be wet, they may not be aware of dropped food items. This is an area where vigilance can make a huge difference and prevent many STF injuries. Most areas of the country get some type of precipitation. This results in wet floors around entry doors and calls for increased awareness and action to prevent slips and falls in these areas. In our housekeeping efforts it is necessary to mop and wax floors from time to time, and since this is a foreign substance, it requires additional precautions.

- Are slip-resistant surfaces or slip resistant mats provided as needed?
- Are wet floor signs set out BEFORE mopping/waxing?
- Are cleaning/waxing operations performed during low traffic times?
- Are safe walkways maintained when cleaning or waxing?
- Are warning signs and floors monitored until they are dry?
- Is the proper floor cleaner used according to manufacturer's instructions?
- Are skid-resistant walk-off mats provided at entrances during wet weather? A minimum of 6 feet of walking surface is needed to dry both feet.
- Do public areas have separate cleaning equipment to prevent spreading materials from back-of-the-house areas to guest areas? Are mop heads frequently changed and mop water regularly refreshed with clean water and chemical?

4. Changes in surface materials

Picture a lady with high heels walking briskly down a carpeted corridor approaching a highly polished marble or granite floor. It is not hard to envision her slipping and falling. This is an area where it will not be easy to change the situation. The best use of effort here may be improving the lighting or increasing the COF of the hard surface.



5. Elevation changes

Changes in the elevation of a walking surface are usually permanent. As with surface changes, calling attention to the change in elevation may be your best use of effort. Contrasting colors, lights and handrails may be most effective for this purpose.

6. Obstructions

Some obstructions are permanent, others temporary. Calling attention to a permanent obstruction by highlighting with contrasting colors or lights is one method of preventing STF incidents. A temporary obstruction should be positioned as to not present a hazard to the majority of persons walking through the area. Fire exit paths should be a minimum of 44 inches in width; storage or carts which have to be in the area should all be along one side so it is not necessary to weave in and out in an emergency.

7. Visibility

Lighting should be adequate to be able to see the walking path ahead and spot other possible factors such as pot holes, changes in surfaces, changes in elevation, and foreign substances. One foot-candle of light is adequate for most situations. Non-functioning lights should be reported to Engineering immediately and repaired as soon as practical.

8. Stairs

The only time stairs are not a hazard is when there are none. If you have stairs you are not likely to do away with them. Building codes typically call for a handrail to be present if there are four or more steps. It is not a bad idea to install handrail for less than four steps as handrails provide a means for the guest or employees to steady themselves. Handrails also call attention to the presence of the steps. Handrails should be secure and able to support 250 lb-ft.

It is rarely acceptable to store materials in a stairwell. And NEVER store anything in a fire exit stairwell. It is never acceptable to leave stored items on the steps of stairs.

Good lighting and contrasting color between steps and adjacent flooring are important to recognizing the presence of stairs. Approximately 80% of falls occur on the first two or last two steps.

9. Human factors

This encompasses a myriad of factors and conditions. This may include the elderly and the young, ladies in high heels and kids in cleats, guests or employees with bifocals and guests who may have had a few too many drinks. You are not going to change the guest demographics but you should be aware of who they are and what their issues are while at your property. Employees should have appropriate shoes for their work area. Shoes with slip resistance soles should be worn in back of the house areas; this can reduce injuries among employees by up to 50%.

It is generally accepted that 85 – 95% of injuries, including slips, trips and falls, are a result of “unsafe actions” not “unsafe conditions.” It is important both employees and Management be accountable regarding elimination of unsafe behaviors in the workplace.

- Has an expectation of working safely been established?
- Are slip resistant shoes required for employees in food prep, service and housekeeping?
- Are employees prohibited from wearing open-toed, high-heeled shoes in back-of-house areas?
- Are employees aware that using chairs, buckets, milk crates or similar equipment as stepladders or stools is not acceptable?
- Is discipline used consistently to correct unsafe behavior?
- Do managers and supervisors discourage undue haste or shortcuts, even when approaching a deadline?

10. Distractions

Distractions will vary from person to person and may be temporary or permanent. Guests in and around swimming pool areas are usually a distraction to other guests; employees may have “tuned them out.” Distractions are frequently things we have to learn to live with; be sure to minimize the other factors around them.

Finding the clues

The contributing factor for all injuries should be identified and corrective action taken to prevent reoccurrence when possible. A review of accident investigation reports, OSHA logs and/or incident reports can provide valuable information as to where in the facility most falls are occurring and the other contributing factors. For STF incidents the ten factors above should be particularly reviewed.

The key to preventing slips, trips and falls in the hospitality industry is to manage the factors that most frequently contribute to incidents. Do not allow factors that can be changed to add to the hazard of factors that cannot be changed. Employees who walk in a brisk but safe pace, wearing slip resistant shoes on dry, level floors rarely slip, trip or fall. ✧

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