

5.5 Preventing Slips: Contamination



The amount of contamination needed to make a smooth floor slippery is very small indeed. A slightly damp floor will be just as slippery as one with a deep spill of water on it. The only difference is that the big spill may be easier to spot.

Introduction

The term 'contamination' refers to anything on a floor surface that can make it more slippery. In historic properties, this is usually water or a similar liquid. But dust, mud and other dry contaminants as well as oil and grease can also make a floor very slippery. For example, in medieval stone buildings turrets with spiral stairs can be contaminated with stone dust from pedestrian traffic and natural movement of the building. This can present a significant slip hazard. Another source of contaminant is gravel migrating, say from a drive to stone paving. Pea gravel can be particularly problematic.

By controlling contamination it is possible to reduce the risk of slips on smooth, shiny floors significantly. For many areas in a building a smooth, shiny floor is perfectly suitable provided that the correct precautions are in place and the floor is managed correctly to ensure that it stays clean and dry.

Best practice

These include:

- **Implement adequate precautions** to ensure that smooth, shiny floors stay clean and dry.
- **Control walk-in contamination at entrances to the building**, particularly when there are adverse weather conditions expected. This is very important. Good entrance design is about more than just providing adequate matting. Well-designed canopies or other existing features (e.g. porches) outside the entrance with good drainage, can reduce the volume of water etc. that can be walked-in significantly but they must be properly maintained.

- **Provide entrance matting of a suitable size and material** and ensure it is periodically cleaned. Use absorbent fabric mats designed to remove water from shoes, rather than rubber or metal 'scraper' mats designed to remove dirt. Several meters of matting may be necessary in order to fully dry people's feet. To get an idea of how effective your current entrances are, review them on wet days and see if wet footprints can still be seen beyond your current matting.
- **Position entrance matting properly** so that people accessing the building walk across it.
- **Fix and periodically check entrance matting** so that mats don't move (exposing slippery flooring by the entrance) or curl (creating a trip hazard) during the day.
- **Adopt good cleaning practices** (see [module 5.2, Preventing slips: Cleaning](#)) to make sure flooring remains dry once cleaned and free from any contamination from detergents, waxes or other treatments used.
- **Fix any leaks** so that water or any other contaminant does not get on the flooring. If buckets are used temporarily to catch water from leaking roofs, ensure that they contrast visually with the surrounding floor to reduce the risk of someone tripping over them. Consider whether the presence of the bucket is more likely to cause someone to fall than simply letting the floor get wet, this is likely to be the case on slip resistant flooring.
- **Reduce the risk of spills** for example by supplying lids on drinks cups, providing trays in restaurant areas or adding drip trays to trolleys.



A contrasting colour bucket that stands out can reduce the risk of someone tripping over it.

- **Implement appropriate procedures to clean up unexpected spills.** Most wet spills can be dried up without the need for wet mopping, which will only increase the area of wet flooring. Greasy spills, such as food, will need to be cleaned using a detergent solution (see [module 5.2, Preventing slips: Cleaning](#)).
- **Provide training and information for employees and volunteers** outlining the importance of good housekeeping standards. All staff and volunteers should be encouraged to take responsibility for this simple but crucial task.
- **Periodically monitor to check for contamination** so that spills can be identified and removed in a timely manner, especially in high-risk areas such as food preparation areas or when the weather is bad. More frequent checks may be needed where there is high footfall; for example when events (such as, concerts, open days etc.) are planned that have the potential to introduce additional sources of contamination; or where the weather is bad.

Challenges for historic properties

The main difficulty in many historic properties is that the flooring is often slippery when wet and is part of the historic fabric of the building. Therefore, replacing or modifying the floor to improve its slip resistance may not be practical. Also, the opportunities to install fixed features (e.g. canopies) that protect against walk-in contaminant may be limited.

Where a change of floor, or floor treatment, is not practical, precautions to prevent flooring from becoming contaminated are key to preventing slips. This can also prove difficult on occasion as many premises are open to the public and have a high footfall, increasing the risk of contamination.

Other possible solutions

These include:

- **Discourage people from taking shortcuts over grass or dirt** which are likely to become slippery when wet. In some cases, it may be appropriate to consider converting existing shortcuts into proper paths.
- **Provide appropriate, absorbent entrance matting.** Not all matting absorbs water or removes contaminant in the same way, and this will need some consideration if it is to be effective in reducing the amount of water being walked in through the building entrance. It is a good idea to check how effective entrance matting is. This can be checked very easily on wet days by observing the entrance and looking at how far water is tracked into the building.
- **If the current mat is not sufficient, additional temporary matting may be useful on wet days.** It is important to check that temporary matting lies flat so it doesn't present a trip hazard and is positioned correctly to avoid people walking on smooth floors before getting to the mat. The position of temporary mats will need monitoring as they will often move during the day and may need repositioning.
- **Clean entrance matting periodically, removing any contaminant from it** so that it can continue to do its job effectively and reduce the potential for trapped contaminant to be walked-in by others.
- **Appoint someone with specific responsibility for monitoring high risk floors** and removing contamination.
- **Restrict the availability of drinks in high risk areas** (e.g. rooms used for dancing during weddings).
- **Consider the use of matting or spill kits for areas with smooth flooring** where liquids are common such as temporary bars.



Providing and positioning absorbent entrance matting properly will reduce the risk from walk-in contaminant.

- **Check outdoor footpaths on a regular basis** and remove any rubble, debris or leaves that have built up.
- **Make a note of the checks you make and any issues identified.** In some cases, it may be useful to focus on busy areas or areas known to have a history of slips. It is also a good idea to involve all staff in this process, spotting and removing a spill is something anyone can do. It will also be necessary to consider how any defects that are identified are going to be put right. If this can't be done immediately and they present a significant danger, other precautions might be necessary to make areas safe. This may be in the form of barriers, warning signs etc. Be aware that barriers are likely to be much more effective than signs at warning people about slippery flooring and keeping them away from high risk areas.

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