


5.6 Preventing slips: Footwear



Wearing appropriate slip resistant footwear significantly reduces the risk of slipping, even when walking on challenging surfaces such as smooth wet floors.

Introduction

Most historic properties will be open to members of the public, which obviously makes controlling the footwear many people are wearing very difficult. However, it may be practical and cost-effective to control the footwear worn by staff in certain high-risk areas and this shouldn't be overlooked.

For specific tasks or job roles that expose staff to a high-risk of slipping (e.g. working in food preparation areas), providing slip resistant footwear can be an effective way of preventing slips. For some activities or job roles, it may be the only way to reduce the risk of staff slipping. For example, when wet-cleaning smooth floors or for grounds staff who work outdoors for a significant amount of time.

If staff are required to wear certain footwear to prevent slips, then the employer must provide that footwear free of charge. This can often save an organisation a lot of money as a small investment in footwear can prevent costly and unpleasant slips. There are also other footwear options available, such as overshoes, which can be stored locally and provided to individual staff as necessary.

Best practice

These include:

- **Identify all tasks** where the use of safety footwear may be required to protect people from the risk of slipping.
- **Provide footwear with adequate slip resistant properties.** There are many excellent slip resistant soles available on a range of footwear including wellingtons, ankle boots, shoes and trainers. However, selecting a suitable shoe is made difficult by the poor quality of current test standards for slip resistance. It is Health and Safety Executive's opinion that these standards are not relevant to pedestrian slips, which means that you can buy footwear labelled as slip resistant and still find it provides little protection from slipping.

The Health and Safety Laboratory (HSL) has developed the [GRIP rating scheme](#) for the slip resistance of footwear. The scheme uses rigorous, scientific testing to measure and grade the slip resistance of footwear. It is designed to provide good quality information to those purchasing footwear, to help them identify suitable slip resistant footwear and reducing the risk of slipping accidents. The scheme uses a one to five-star rating

system where the more stars the footwear has, the better the slip resistance. Not all staff will need five star footwear, each star rating relates to a certain level of risk.

- **Use footwear rated two or three-star** (under the GRIP rating scheme) for wet environments to protect staff.
- **Use footwear rated four or five-star** (under the GRIP rating scheme) to protect staff where greasy contaminants are likely (such as, in a kitchen).
- **Make sure staff and volunteers know** when to use the footwear provided and how to report any defects with it.
- **Make sure that any footwear provided is looked after and properly stored** when it is not being used.
- **Monitor the effectiveness of the footwear provided** to protect employees and volunteers from slipping. For example, if slips still occur where footwear with a two-star rating is provided, you should consider upgrading the footwear to a higher rating.

Challenges for historic properties

As pedestrian traffic at a historic property is largely comprised of members of the public, it is difficult to protect the majority of people by providing slip resistant footwear. In addition to this, they are less likely to have staff working in high-risk areas for long periods of time when compared to other sectors. So providing slip resistant footwear to staff for free may not always be a cost-effective option.

Sometimes staff are required to wear disposable plastic shoe covers when entering delicate areas. For example, this could be where conservation cleaning is taking place. These can present a slip hazard. On other occasions heel protectors are used for high-heeled shoes during functions and events.

In certain areas however, providing suitable slip resistant footwear may not only be a practical way of preventing slips, but also a cost-effective way of reducing any risk. It may also make staff feel valued.

Many organisations require staff to buy their own shoes, making sure that they select footwear with 'good grip' to keep them safe whilst they are at work. While requiring sensible footwear to be worn reduces the likelihood of people wearing wholly inappropriate footwear, such as flip flops, relying on staff to select their own footwear which provides sufficient slip-resistance will not reduce the risk of slipping. It is impossible to reliably identify suitable footwear by looking at the soles, a chunky tread pattern does not guarantee slip-resistance. If suitable footwear is needed to control risk, the HSL GRIP scheme should be used as the basis of footwear selection.

Footwear is just one factor that contributes to a slip or fall occurring. If someone falls, it should not be assumed that their footwear is the only cause of this. It is very easy to assume that an accident happened because someone was wearing 'stupid shoes' and ignore other factors which could lead to another incident if they are not addressed.

Other possible solutions

These include:

- Where staff are working in high-risk areas, or undertaking high-risk activities (e.g. grounds staff, maintenance workers, kitchen staff, cleaners), consider providing them with slip resistant footwear.
- When providing footwear to prevent slips, specify the slip resistance using the HSL GRIP scheme.
- Where providing slip resistant footwear to staff is impractical, consider the use of slip resistant overshoes to protect them during high-risk activities (such as, wet cleaning smooth floors). In providing these, the overshoes should be specified using the HSL GRIP scheme.
- Train staff and volunteers to offer guidance and assistance to visitors, where appropriate, when accessing areas that might present particular slip or trip hazards.
- Provide accessible information for visitors warning of any challenging areas and access issues requiring the need for appropriate footwear. For example, this information can be highlighted on your website.
- When investigating slips, avoid a focus on an individual's footwear as being the single cause, consider and investigate other contributory factors which may be easy to fix.



An example of a slip resistant overshoe.

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