

Church Guidance Note

Slips and trips



Slips and trips are the most common causes of injury in churches. While most of these are minor, others can be quite severe and in some cases are disabling.

Slip and trip hazards are not only present inside the church itself, but are common outside it too – in church halls, churchyards and car parks. Frequently, these can be compounded by the difficulty the frail, elderly and disabled may have in negotiating access to and from the church.

Most slips occur in wet or contaminated conditions, frequently as a result of the weather or spillages. Commonly, trips are caused by worn paths, steps or floor coverings, and where electricity cables trail across the floor.

Legal requirements

Specific duties relating to the prevention of slips and trips are detailed in the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations. If you are an employer or have control of premises used as a workplace, you will need to comply with them. The term 'workplace' is very broad and could include a church.

In relation to slips and trips, the regulations require that workplaces:

- Are kept clean, properly maintained and are well lit
- Permit safe access
- Have floors capable of being kept clean
- Have floors, paths, etc. that are free from obstructions and substances liable to cause someone to slip or trip, that have no holes or adverse slopes, are even and are not slippery, and have adequate drainage where necessary.

Even if you are not an employer, you may still have to comply with certain aspects of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and other related law; for example, if you control non-domestic premises, such as a church hall. Here, you may need to make sure that access is safe.

Beyond this, you also need to meet your common law duty of care, ensuring that your premises do not cause injury to another because you have acted negligently.

Risk Advice Line

Should you have any additional questions on this topic or other risk-related matters, as a valued Ecclesiastical customer you can contact us through our Risk Advice Line on

0345 600 7531

(Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm, excluding bank holidays)

and one of our in-house risk professionals will be able to assist.














Alternatively, you can email us at

risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com















and one of our experts will call you back within 24 hours.

Hazards to look out for*

Internal

					
Loose, worn, frayed or unfixed carpets, rugs, mats and other floor coverings	Loose, damaged and uneven tiles, stone paving, flagstones and floorboards	Pew platforms	Variations in the level of floors (for example, ramps) or stairs (for example, irregular steps, chancel steps, etc.)	'Slippery' floor materials and coverings, particularly in church halls	Worn, steep and uneven steps and stairs
					
Inadequate lighting, particularly on steps and stairs	Lack of or inadequate handrails on steps and stairs	Trailing electric leads and other obstructions	Cleaning activity, making floors more slippery (for example, wet mopping or use of polishes)	Wet or contaminated floors from poor maintenance of the building (for example, leaking roofs)	Spillages of food or drink, particularly in kitchen areas
					
Walk-in contaminant from adverse weather (for example, mud, rainwater, etc.)					

External

					
Uneven footpaths	Damaged paving stones and slabs	Damaged access and boiler room steps	Variations in the level of floors (for example, ramps) or stairs (for example, irregular steps, chancel steps, etc.)	Unprotected drops	Gravestones, kerbs, ledger stones and other obstructions, particularly if they are obscured by long grass
					
Protruding tree roots and undergrowth particularly on footpaths or other access routes	Poor drainage of footpaths	Growth of algae or moss	Accumulations of wet leaves or loose materials	Inadequate lighting particularly on steps and stairs	Lack of or inadequate handrails on steps and stairs
					
Unprotected open graves prior to burials	Adverse weather making footpaths, steps etc. unsafe (for example, rain, snow and ice, etc.)				

*This list is not exhaustive.

Precautions you can take*

Typical precautions include:

- Regular maintenance and repair of floor surfaces, steps and footpaths
- Replacing or repairing cracked or damaged stone flags, ceramic or clay tiles and wood blocks
- Removing or replacing worn, damaged or loose floor coverings (for example, carpets, mats, rugs, etc.)
- Fixing down carpets and entrance matting securely
- Regular maintenance and repair of roofs, ceilings and guttering
- Highlighting unexpected changes or variations in floor levels, steps or stairs
- Providing adequate or enhanced lighting
- Providing steps, stairs and steep paths with suitable handrails
- Avoiding or covering trailing electric leads
- Removing stored furniture and other obstructions from footpaths and walkways
- Regular cleaning of floors and coverings
- Making access safe until proper repairs can be carried out
- Providing barriers and warning signs where cleaning is or has taken place
- Providing entrance matting
- Providing adequate barriers and warnings where there are unprotected drops
- Regular maintenance and proper repair of external drainage
- Cutting grass regularly in the churchyard
- Removing protruding tree roots and undergrowth where these are obstructing access
- Removing algae, moss or accumulations of leaves on external footpaths
- Gritting footpaths where snow or ice is forecast and removing snowfall where this occurs
- Removing, replacing or repairing broken graves or kerbs
- Repairing potholes or uneven surfaces in paths, driveways, car parks and steps.

*This list is not exhaustive.



Making a start

Action

1. Carry out a thorough inspection of your church to identify slip or trip hazards.

In doing this, consider the difficulty the frail, elderly and disabled may have in negotiating access to and from your church. Also, consider that some visitors may be unfamiliar with its layout and features.

Remember to include the churchyard, church hall and car park in your inspection where you have them.

Make a note of the hazards you have identified.

Guidance

You can use the hazard list above to help you identify these.

Where you are an employer, you will need to complete formal risk assessments. These should identify slip and trip hazards for you.

Again, you can use the hazards and precautions list above to help you. Alternatively, you can use these with our church risk assessment template.

2. Check that the precautions you have in place are adequate. If they are not, identify any additional ones that are needed.

Make a note of these and who will be responsible for taking any action.

Typical precautions are set out above. You can use this list to help decide if any further precautions are necessary. These will vary depending on your particular circumstances.

Formal risk assessments should check the adequacy of any existing precautions, noting anything further that needs to be done.

3. Make periodic checks to ensure that floors, coverings, steps and pathways remain in good condition, free from obstruction and that any precautions (such as lighting) remain adequate.

Make a note of the checks you make and any issues identified.

You may need to complete more frequent checks before or during events and where the weather is inclement or becomes more seasonal.

You will also need 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, you will need to provide additional precautions to guard against this. This may be in the form of barriers, coverings, warning signs, etc.

4. Ensure that employees and volunteers are aware of the precautions required to prevent slips and trips.

Make a note of any information or training that is provided to individuals.

The level of information and training required will vary depending on the nature of the work and your particular circumstances. If you have completed formal risk assessments, these will help you determine what is necessary.

In particular, you may want to advise employees and volunteers how to report any hazards they come across.

Making a start

Action

5. Document your arrangements and responsibilities for preventing slips and trips.

Review these where necessary, particularly if you suspect that they are no longer valid.

Keep the notes you have made in steps one, two, three and four above.

Guidance

If you have prepared a health and safety policy, record these as part of it.

You can use our church health and safety policy template if you haven't done this and need one to comply with health and safety law.

Want to know more?

Other useful health and safety information is available at www.ecclesiastical.com/healthandsafety

Further guidance and resources are also available at: www.hse.gov.uk/slips

Note: if you are in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man, then regional variations might apply. In this instance, you should check the guidance provided by the Enforcing Agency for your region. This will be freely available on their website.

Need to report an incident involving an injury?

If an incident occurs that may result in a claim for injury, please retain any accident investigation records, e.g. accident book entry, photos etc. and contact our specialist claims team on **0345 603 8381** (Monday to Friday 8am – 6pm) for advice. Where you have received correspondence about a claim being made against you, it is important that you notify us immediately and email a copy to our experts on casualtyclaims@ecclesiastical.com.

Policy cover queries

For queries about your policy cover, call our specialist church team on **0345 777 3322** (Monday to Friday 8am – 6pm, excluding bank holidays) or email us at churches@ecclesiastical.com.

Alternatively, please visit www.ecclesiastical.com/church.

This guidance is provided for information purposes and is general and educational in nature. It should not be used as a substitute for taking professional advice on specific issues and should not be taken as providing legal advice on any of the topics addressed.



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