Reducing Slips, Trips and Falls

The University of Birmingham is involved with work at the cutting edge of technology and research, often using potentially hazardous equipment, materials or substances or carrying out potential hazardous processes or activities. However, in spite of this, about 30% of all accidents and 50% of all serious injuries reported to the Health and Safety Unit at the University are due to slips, trips and falls. Reducing slips, trips and falls is a key objective.

Our situation at Birmingham University mirrors the situation across the country. Statistics from the Health and Safety Executive show that slips, trips and falls are the most common cause of accidents across the education, service and manufacturing sectors. Recognising this, the Government has included reducing slips trips and falls as one of their priorities to improve health and safety performance nationally.

Injuries from slips, trips and falls often cause pain, distress and inconvenience to the injured person and disruption to the working of the University if staff are absent from work. The common acute injuries caused include sprain, strains, bruising and fractures. Sometimes these injuries can have long term, chronic affects, which can last for many years, even for life.

Over the last ten years the time lost from staff being off work due to slips, trips and falls is equivalent to one full time employee. Students also have had accidents causing them to be away from their studies or research due to sustaining serious injury.

The University’s Health and Safety Unit recognise that only a small proportion of the slips, trips and falls that occur at the University ever get reported. It should be remembered that all slips, trips and falls have the potential to cause serious injury.

What can we do at Birmingham University to reduce slips, trips and falls?

First we need to identify the causes. Some solutions may easily and cheaply instigated, others may need more effort and resources.

At the University causes of slips, trips and falls can be catagorised as being due to:

- The condition of infrastructure of the University
- Organisational arrangements
- Housekeeping
- Individuals
Everyone can play a part in reducing slips, trips and falls.

- The Health and Safety Unit works with Estate Management to identify hazardous areas
- Budget Centres can give priority and publicity to the initiative
- Individuals can be alert and report problems and incidences of slipping, tripping and falling

The condition of the infrastructure of the University

This includes the condition of the roads, paths, pavements, steps, floors, stairs etc. Maintaining the infrastructure is an unending task. The responsibility falls to Estate Management who have a system for inspection and for dealing with acute problems, for example raised paving slabs, ice and snow etc. They also have a long term programme for improving the condition of the infrastructure.

Of course, designing out hazards is the best solution. For example avoiding sudden level changes, using tarmac instead of paving slabs, installing slip resistant flooring.

Organisational arrangements

Work should to be planned to minimise the creation of slip, trip and fall hazards. Careful selection of materials, equipment and work practices is needed. For example mopping floors at quiet times and putting out warning signs, preventing water getting onto floors, designing workstations to eliminate trailing cables.

Everyone needs to be involved and committed. Managers and supervisors should ensure that workplaces are kept safe or make arrangements to rectify problems.

Housekeeping

Good housekeeping will go a long way to reduce the risks of slips, trips and falls. Again everyone needs to be involved. For example being tidy, keeping walkways clear, cleaning up accidental spills, shutting cupboard doors and draws, taking care where items are placed and stored.

Individuals

The action of individuals themselves can reduce the number of slips, trips and falls. For example not rushing, not carrying excessive loads, wearing appropriate footwear and just looking carefully where they are going and using common sense.

On the following pages is a table giving guidance on measures that can be taken to reduce the risk of slips, trips and falls and some examples of good and bad practice.
GUIDANCE ON MEASURES THAT CAN BE TAKEN TO REDUCE THE RISK OF SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS.

| External paths, steps, car parks etc. | Ensure paving slabs are secure and tarmac paths are in good condition to give a flat, even surface.  
• Maintain parking areas so that they are free of potholes  
• Install and maintain suitable lighting  
• Ensure steps and paths are suitable for the volume of pedestrian traffic  
• Mark the nosing of steps using anti-slip coating  
• Provide handrails where appropriate and maintain in good condition  
• Discourage short cuts across grassed/muddy areas  
• Clean leaves, mud etc. from surfaces  
• Remove algal growth  
• Have in place effective procedures to deal with snow or ice |
| Building entrances/exits | Provide suitable non-slip, water absorbing mats at entrances  
• Maintain mats in good condition and change when saturated  
• Ensure that temporary matting does not pose a trip risk  
• Display signs warning of hidden steps/changes of level  
• Display signs warning of risk of slipping when appropriate  
• Site door catches and door stops safely |
| Internal corridors and stairs | Arrange to have a staggered release of students onto heavily used traffic routes and have flow management on busy corridors and stairs  
• Mark nosing of steps using anti-slip coating  
• Provide handrails  
• Install and maintain suitable lighting  
• Apply appropriate anti-slip coatings to areas of smooth flooring which may become wet  
• Clean floor/stairs at quiet times  
• Dry floors/stairs effectively after cleaning  
• Display suitable warning signs on wet floors/stairs while cleaning is in progress and remove them when cleaning/drying is complete |
| Laboratories and workshops | Avoid trailing cables from equipment and tools  
• Provide suitable storage facilities for goods, equipment and personal items  
• Keep containers of bulk liquids in bunded areas  
• Keep areas around machines and other equipment clear  
• Provide specialist anti-slip flooring in potentially wet areas and around machines  
• Clear up around machines and equipment  
• Wear suitable footwear  
• Avoid overcrowding of rooms |
Guidance on measures that can be taken to reduce the risk of slips, trips and falls (continued).

| Kitchens and dining areas | • Provide suitable equipment to avoid spillages (from cooking, washing etc.)  
|                          | • Provide edged work surfaces to contain spillages  
|                          | • Ensure good ventilation to avoid steam and condensation  
|                          | • Wear suitable footwear  
|                          | • Ensure good housekeeping around bins  
|                          | • Clean spillages and pick up food contamination immediately  
|                          | • Provide suitable floor surface  
|                          | • Clean floors with appropriate products for surface after work has finished  
|                          | • Dry floors effectively after cleaning  
|                          | • Display suitable warning signs on wet floors while cleaning is in progress and remove them when cleaning/drying is complete |

| Offices | • Avoid trailing cables: use cable covers if necessary  
|         | • Provide adequate storage and avoid storage on floors  
|         | • Ensure good housekeeping round photocopiers, printers etc.  
|         | • Replace worn or damaged carpets/tiles |

| Sports halls, swimming pools and changing rooms | • Avoid overpolishing of floor surface  
|                                                   | • Maintain floor mats in good condition and ensure they remain flat  
|                                                   | • Keep smooth floors clean and completely free of wet or dusty contamination  
|                                                   | • Wear suitable footwear  
|                                                   | • Avoid contamination of the floor surface with mud/water  
|                                                   | • Provide cleaning brushes/scrapers  
|                                                   | • Provide non-slip tiling on wet floor surfaces  
|                                                   | • Provide drainage mats or grids in shower areas  
|                                                   | • Provide handholds for people with disabilities |

| Events | • Ensure temporary cabling is routed safely and protected from damage  
|        | • Provide sufficient lighting  
|        | • Use temporary matting on grassed areas |

| Field trips etc. | • Assess location, route and weather conditions and modify if necessary  
|                 | • Wear suitable footwear |

EXAMPLES OF GOOD AND BAD PRACTICE

Good housekeeping. Wires at the back of the computer could be a hazard.

Wires covered. Better if desk was against the wall. Files on floor a trip hazard.

Trip hazard in the gangway of a workshop

Typical trip hazards: box and binding on floor, draw open.

No comment needed!

Burnt arm on a hot surface as a result of tripping in a kitchen
EXAMPLES OF GOOD AND BAD PRACTICE (CONTINUED)

Good housekeeping standards in a laboratory

More good housekeeping standards in a laboratory

Spillage and a cable on the floor

Open channel in a floor

Uneven flooring