



FACILITIES AND MAINTENANCE

By Dan Silver

Flooring Safety: Reducing Slips, Trips, and Falls

A new survey has shown that facilities struggle to control slips, trips, and falls. Every year, same-level slips, trips, and falls send five million people to the emergency room with sprains, strains, bruises, and breaks—costing American businesses \$11 billion in the last year alone, according to the 2017 *Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index*. We need to consider the reasons behind the accidents and the remedies for protecting faculty, staff members, and students.

Despite Rising Costs, Prevention is Low Priority

The National Safety Council suggests that half of all slips, trips and falls are the result of unsafe floors caused by factors that range from the inherent slipperiness of the floor surface, to wet weather, to contaminants like spills and overspray, to rippled floor mats. Add in variables like a person's choice of shoes, their physical condition or level of distraction, and accidents are bound to happen. However, most facility managers don't appear to be considering falls as a significant issue to address.

Several years ago, the Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety (LMRIS) polled 231 financial decision-makers at companies with 100 or more employees and found that preventing slips and falls ranked fifth for resource allocation, despite statistical evidence showing that same-level falls are becoming the most expensive cause of injury for U.S. employers.

Eye-Opening Survey Results on Slips-and-Falls

In 2017, we surveyed professionals in maintenance, safety, health, risk and facilities management from various industries to understand how they are addressing slips, trips and falls. Their responses were eye-opening:

First, over half of the professionals who responded don't consider fall prevention a top priority, even though 42% confirmed at least one fall in the past year and a significant number had more than five falls.

In fact, when ranking their floor safety efforts in order of importance, *providing safe walking surfaces* came in dead last, behind safety training, requiring appropriate footwear and following proper floor cleaning procedures.

Additionally, fewer than a quarter of survey respondents said they were in complete control of slips, trips and falls while 71% said they have only partial control or no control at all. Another 24% said they leave their floor safety in the hands of their rental mat vendor or cleaning company, and 23% of respondents reported having at least one fall that resulted in a workers' compensation claim or legal action, while 18% reported falls involving a non-employee.

While 8% were certain they've paid to settle a slip-and-fall claim, almost half were unsure or unwilling to confirm if their facility ever made a fall-related financial settlement.

Where the Problem Starts

Nearly all of the professionals surveyed said they use carpeted floor mats inside their entrance, with over half saying it was a primary fall location. Over a third also confirmed that rain and snow tracked in from outside was a major culprit for slips and falls.

However, putting mats in an entrance doesn't come close to guaranteeing fewer falls. If a facility uses a patchwork of smaller mats instead of a single mat that's large enough to properly cover the area, the entrance can quickly become a tripping hazard. In fact, nearly 15% of surveyed professionals report that wrinkled, bunched-up or shifting mats lead to falls in their facility—the second-largest cause of falls behind rain and snow.

How the Problem Spreads Facility-Wide

New Pig also found that a large number of slips, trips, and falls occurs in other parts of the facility, including walkways, transition areas, breakrooms, frequent spill areas and work spaces around machines and equipment. More often than not, these risk zones aren't protected by any type of floor mat.

Survey participants also underestimated the total number of high-risk zones in their facility. Over a third thought there were only two or three, but overall, they reported falls in ten or more locations.

Every Facility is Unique

The survey shows that floor safety issues are unique to every facility and can't be resolved with a quick, one-and-done solution. And while entrance matting is a good place to start, best practices require that much more be done. Every facility needs to evaluate their distinct risks, take steps that fit their situation, and be vigilant about monitoring floor conditions. Because when it comes to preventing costly slips, trips, and falls, no one should have to ask who's minding the floor.



Ways to Improve Flooring Safety Immediately

Audit your walkways. A walkway audit will help you identify slip, trip, and fall hazards throughout your facility. Do a walk-through to identify the heaviest foot traffic areas, check floor conditions and make a note of trouble spots that require attention. Reviewing incident reports and workers' comp claims can also help you identify high risk zones.

Engage your team. Get your staff involved in your safety efforts. Hold training sessions to educate them about the floor safety hazards at your facility and review what they can do to prevent accidents. Encourage them to report problems as soon as they find them.

Cover your entrance. Make sure you have adequate walk-off inside your entrance. Even if you're using scraper mats outside and in the vestibule, you need at least 10 feet inside the door to capture moisture, dirt and grime and prevent it from being tracked into your facility.

Map out your mats. Create a plan for mat placement so you can be sure you're covered everywhere safe footing might be at risk. This

can include main and secondary entrances, employee and customer walkways, transition areas, breakrooms, water fountains, restrooms, frequent spill areas, and work spaces around machines and equipment—especially where process liquids or water might be present.

Have the right mats for each area. Not only do you need to have enough mats to cover all of your potentially hazardous walk zones, but the mats must also be the right size. Trying to protect a 6' x 10' area with four 3' x 5' mats creates gaps, ripples and flipped-up corners that become tripping hazards. Placing a mat that's too large for an area also causes problems when it catches feet and cart wheels.

Dealing with Hazards

You can also deal with the various hazards in your facility by using a new alternative to traditional carpeted floor mats—adhesive-backed floor mats. Adhesive-backed mats control moisture and dirt as well as their rubber-backed counterparts, but they're a safer choice because they adhere to the floor surface and don't move—eliminating the ripples and flipped-up corners that cause trips and falls. These mats can also be cut to fit to create the right-sized coverage anywhere they're needed.

Taking Control of Floor Maintenance

If you're renting mats and/or outsourcing your floor maintenance, it's time to get involved with your vendors. Meet with your floor maintenance company rep to make sure they're using proper cleaning methods for your floor surfaces and scheduling maintenance when it will have the least impact on the traffic moving through your facility.

You should also direct your mat rental company to place mats according to your plan. Finally, train employees to inspect and reposition them if they move or shift between deliveries or during floor maintenance; keep in mind, as well, that this continuing, labor-intensive job is necessary.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dan Silver has been the Vice President of Product Development at New Pig since 2007, leading an award-winning group that thrives on fast-paced, insight-driven innovation. For more information, visit www.newpig.com.



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"I met Ms. Wanda on my first day as a freshman... She is one of the most genuinely kind and caring individuals I have ever met and she has brought joy to so many lives. She never shies away from hard work and always goes the extra mile to help me and the thousands of other residents whose lives she has changed...She has been a significant part of my success."

For Wanda, her job is more than just the task at hand -- it's a personal connection to the people she helps every day.

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