



THE WALK ZONE SAFETY REPORT

**COSTLY SLIP AND FALL RISKS REMAIN UNDERESTIMATED;
ORGANIZATIONS UNDERPREPARED**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every year, same-level slips, trips and falls send five million people to the emergency room with sprains, strains, bruises and breaks—leading to significant wage and productivity losses, medical expenses and damaged corporate reputations. In 2016, businesses paid \$11 billion in direct costs for slips, trips and falls, according to the 2017 Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index. And the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that same-level slip and fall accidents accounted for 238,000 workplace injuries in 2015.

New Pig, the world's authority on leaks, drips and spills, conducted a survey of professionals involved in floor safety across multiple industries to get a detailed look at organizations' level of awareness of this issue and how they're attempting to address it to make their facilities safer for employees and customers.

Despite the overwhelming statistical evidence of the problem, the survey results highlight the fact that slips, trips and falls continue to present a major risk which is still not being adequately addressed. They also provide some answers about why this may be happening—including often overlooked “walk zones” that present risks for slips, trips and falls. The overwhelming majority (92%) of companies place floor mats in



their entranceways while leaving numerous other risk zones uncovered. Risky walk zones—such as kitchens, restrooms, loading docks and other areas where leaks or spills frequently occur—regularly go unaddressed by the majority of organizations or, worse, are addressed with inadequate solutions.

The results also provide a detailed look at the frequency and location of falls, as well as misconceptions about the risks. Only 39% of organizations consider same-level fall prevention a top priority, and most (58%) rely on traditional, rented rubber-backed floor mats to address the issue, leaving several areas uncovered and often creating new hazards when the mats shift, ripple or curl. The results point to a general lack of preparedness and understanding of the full scope of the issue.

METHODOLOGY AND RESPONDENT PROFILE

In March 2017, New Pig conducted a survey of professionals in maintenance, safety, health, risk and facilities management roles, across industries spanning manufacturing and public-facing facilities, such as

supermarkets, retail and other commercial spaces. The data presented in this report is from 369 completed surveys. All fall-related questions focused only on same-level falls, excluding falls from heights.

KEY FINDINGS

SLIPS AND FALLS ARE OUT OF CONTROL

The survey data shows that organizations are struggling to control slips, trips and falls. Forty-two percent of respondents confirmed at least one fall in the past year. Five percent of respondents had more than five falls in the past year (4% had 6–10 and 1% had 11–20).

Not only are preventable falls continuing to occur, but the results highlight the fact that they often carry serious consequences. Eighteen percent of reported falls involved a non-employee. Nearly a quarter of respondents (23%) said that their company had previously experienced at least one fall that resulted in a workers' compensation claim or legal action. Eight percent have paid out a fall-related financial settlement at some point. Yet another 48% were not sure if they'd ever paid out a settlement, highlighting a potentially significant lack of awareness around the risk and liability this issue can pose.



In still other cases, organizations may be aware of the safety risk but lack confidence in their ability to address it. Seventy-one percent of respondents feel they either have no control, or only some control of slips, trips and falls, while just 22% said they feel they are in complete control. Nearly a quarter (24%) said they outsource this control, leaving the responsibility of ensuring safe walking conditions in the hands of their rental mat vendor, their cleaning company or other services firms. This is problematic, since external organizations aren't the ones bearing the risk. Even worse, in some cases (8% of respondents), no one in particular is in charge.

FALL ZONES EXTEND FAR BEYOND THE ENTRYWAY

The survey looked at the specific locations and causes of falls and found that one of the primary reasons they continue at such a high frequency is that many potentially hazardous walk zones are left unprotected. While entranceways are one of the most obvious risk areas, the attention they receive tends to be overwhelmingly disproportionate, compared to the rest of the building.

Fifty-one percent of respondents reported the entranceway as a location where most falls occur in their facility. Rain and snow brought in from outside was a likely cause of many of those, with 37%

reporting that as the primary cause of falls in their building. Most organizations are trying to address that area; 92% reported placing floor mats in entranceways.

However, a large number of slips, trips and falls occur in "underserved" areas such as employee walkways, where 24% of respondents reported falls, customer walkways (14% of respondents), around equipment or machines (23%), frequent spill areas (20%) and the kitchen (9%). And yet, more often than not, these fall zones are not covered with any type of floor mat. Less than a third (31%) of respondents reported placing floor mats in

customer walkways, only 41% reported placing floor mats in employee walkways and aisles, only 35% said they place them around equipment or machines, just 23% in frequent spill areas, and only 22% in the kitchen. Transition areas—the borders between different types of flooring within a building—represent another type of significantly underserved risk zone. These are the areas where foot traffic can carry dirt, water or other contaminants from one area to another, particularly if there is nothing on the floor to contain it. Unfortunately, that is often the case. Less than one in three organizations (31%) said they place mats in transition areas. The lack of attention has serious consequences, with 20% of organizations reporting falls in such an area.

Other underserved areas included the restroom, where 6% of companies reported falls but only 11% of respondents place mats. Three percent of organizations experienced falls by water fountains, where only 7% place mats. Five percent reported falls in loading docks, only 3% of which were covered with mats.

The results shed light on some of the reasons for falls that occurred in some of those non-entranceway zones. Spilled liquids were reported by 11% to be the primary cause of incidents, while machinery leaks,

drips and spills accounted for 8% and wet floors from cleaning accounted for 6%.

Also, the total number of high-risk walk zones appears to be underestimated. The largest percentage of respondents (34%) think there are only 2–3 same-level fall risk areas in their facility, and 12% believe

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there are none. The results indicate that there are likely several more than that, with respondents reporting falls in more than ten different specific locations. The significant disparity between the high number of actual risk zones and the lack of awareness and effort to address all of them—beyond entranceways—presents itself as one of the most glaring explanations for the slip and fall problem.

FAILING TO PREPARE OR PREPARING TO FALL?

Another explanation is that many organizations admit that they don't prioritize the issue or employ any type of floor safety strategy.

In addition to leaving many areas uncovered by floor mats, only 4% of organizations place mats according to a strategic planogram, while more than one in four (28%) rely on their floor mat rental or other services company to decide on placement for them.

The majority of organizations (61%) said they do not make fall prevention a top priority.

When asked to rank their floor safety efforts in order of importance, "providing non-slippery standing and walking surfaces" was ranked last, behind "provide safety training," "require proper footwear" and "follow proper floor cleaning protocols."

The relative lack of priority assigned to creating safer walking surfaces may help explain why so many risk zones go ignored.

TRIPPING OVER THE SOLUTION

For a long time, rubber-backed rental mats have been the most common approach to floor safety, but they are based on outdated technology, often exacerbate fall hazards, and are not as convenient or cost-effective as they may seem. Fifty-eight percent of respondents use rented rubber-backed mats (44% use company-owned mats of the same type), even though that type of mat presents safety risks of its own.

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The fact that the most popular product used to address high-risk walk zones is actually making them worse is perhaps the most startling of the survey's findings. It suggests that the perceived convenience of rubber-backed mats is vastly outweighed by the safety risks they present, and that the time spent cleaning and moving them is wasted effort.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Best Practices for addressing high risk zones and ensuring floor safety.

1

IDENTIFY AND FIX PROBLEM AREAS

Uneven surfaces, deep cracks, loose floor tiles and floor mats that don't lay flat present common hazards that are unrelated to moisture but require attention.

2

FORTIFY ENTRANCES

Grating, canopies, awnings and vestibules can all help minimize the amount of rain, snow, dirt and dust that enters the building. Placing adhesive-backed absorbent mats in entranceways can help capture what does get tracked in.

3

CLEAN UP SPILLS IMMEDIATELY

It only takes one drip to create a slip and fall hazard. Have someone stay with a spill until supplies arrive to clean it up. Stock absorbents and cleaning supplies and compact spill kits near common spill areas.

4

DOWNTIME CLEANING

Schedule routine floor cleaning for times when there will not be traffic in the area and allow time for the floors to dry before people return.

5

AUDIT WALKWAYS

Review all walk zones as part of a floor safety program. Ensure that there is adequate walk-off at all entrances (at least ten feet worth of floor mat) to adequately capture tracked-in dirt and moisture. The audit should also include a review of incident reports and workers' compensation claims to help identify high risk zones.

6

CLEAR OUTDOOR ICE AND SNOW

Clear parking lots and sidewalks at least half an hour before buildings open and close, and give maintenance crews ample supplies of ice melt, traction aids and tools prior to the start of the winter season.

7

PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE

Floors will eventually need to be replaced or resurfaced. The use of absorbent mats in high-traffic areas can help floors last longer by keeping dirt off the floors and reducing wear and cleaning time.

WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW CAN STILL HURT YOU

Many organizations still don't realize the scope of the risk. Only 6% correctly guessed that 85% of workers' compensation claims are related to slips and falls. The remaining 94% underestimated the figure.

A majority of respondents (54%) were also not aware of the final OSHA Walking-Working Surfaces rule, which took effect in January of 2017, providing employee safety standards for a wide range of workplaces. An additional 14% said they are aware, but don't know if they meet the requirements or not. Only 29% reported meeting the requirements.



CONCLUSION

Most customers and employees take for granted that they will be able to walk and work on safe floors, assuming that the businesses they frequent or work for are implementing best practices, such as regularly inspecting, repairing and maintaining floor surfaces. This survey data, however, reveals a more complex reality, in which there is still much more to be done to prevent falls and the associated liability.

The results indicate that the first step toward doing that should involve educational efforts to make sure employees involved in safety efforts fully understand the prevalence and the seriousness of falls—in all high-risk walk zones in the building, not just entranceways. The next logical step is to assess and address all

existing risk zones in a way that eliminates moisture, increases traction, and does not present any new trip hazards. Doing this effectively may require the organization to reclaim decision-making authority from outside vendors, who are not as invested in the safety outcomes of the company.

Organizations that focus disproportionately on entranceways are clearly facing unnecessary risks in other parts of the building. Those relying on dated floor safety products and strategies are leaving themselves open to liability, productivity losses and, most importantly, leaving their employees and customers vulnerable to serious injury.

New Pig are the Leak and Spill Experts. We revolutionized industrial leak and spill management forever with our PIG Original Absorbent Sock in 1985. Since then, we've been solving customers' tough leak and spill problems and leading the industry through innovation and expertise. Today, New Pig offers the world's largest selection of absorbent mats, socks, booms, pillows and wipers, award-winning spill control and liquid management products, as well as well-known, proven products for material handling, personal protection, maintenance, and workplace safety. PIG products have been used in more than 300,000 industrial, commercial, utility, institutional, military and government facilities in over 70 countries. Everything we do is dedicated to helping our customers keep their workplaces clean, safe and productive.



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