



Who's Minding the Floor?

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A new survey shows that facilities struggle to control slips, trips and falls.

By Dan Silver

Every year, same-level slips, trips and falls send 5 million people to the emergency room with sprains, strains, bruises and breaks — costing American businesses \$11 billion in the last year alone.¹ Why is this happening?

Despite Rising Costs, Prevention is a Low Priority

The National Safety Council says that half of all of 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. And yet, most facility managers think falls aren't a big problem.

In 2009 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.

Survey Says: Slips and Falls are Out of Control

In 2017, we surveyed professionals in maintenance, safety, health, risk and facilities management from
 you're dealing with slips, trips and falls. Their responses were eye-

- ✔ 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.
- ✔ 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.
- ✔ 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.
- ✔ 24% said they leave their floor safety in the hands of their rental mat vendor or cleaning company.
- ✔ 23% of respondents reported having at least one fall that resulted in a workers' compensation claim or legal action, and 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.

The problem starts at the entrance...

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.

But 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.

...and spreads throughout the facility

We also found that a large number of slips, trips and falls occur in other parts of the facility, including employee walkways, transition areas, breakrooms, frequent spill areas and work spaces around machines and equipment. And that, 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 10 or more locations.



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.



Want to improve your own floor safety? Here are six things you can do right now:

1. 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.

2. Engage your employees. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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, the mats must be the right size. Trying to protect a 6-foot x 10-foot area with four 3-foot x 5-foot mats creates gaps, ripples and flipped-up corners that become tripping hazards. Placing a mat that's too big for an area also causes problems when it sticks out and catches feet and cart

You can also deal with the varied 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.

6. Take control of your floor safety. 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 it's 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. Train employees to inspect and reposition them if they move or shift between deliveries or during floor maintenance. (NOTE: If you use adhesive-backed mats, this continuing, labor-intensive job is unnecessary.)

¹ 2017 Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index

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