

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this guide is to eliminate or reduce the risk of injury from slips and trips by providing advice and guidance to all persons involved in organising, planning, managing or undertaking work in scaffolding related activities.

Slips and trips on the same level have been identified, through the NASC's annual safety report, as the most common cause of injury at work in the scaffolding industry. They can occur in almost all workplaces and may result in serious accidents, including fractures. Slips and trips can also be the initial cause of a range of other accident types such as falls from height.

2. KEY MESSAGES ABOUT SLIP AND TRIPS

The potential for serious injury from slips and trips cannot be overestimated. Such incidents can have critical consequences and long-term effects. Workers' compensation insurance covers only a small proportion of the costs. It does not account for indirect costs, such as:

- the time to process and manage the injury;
- increased workloads for other staff;
- loss of expertise and necessary skills and additional training for replacement staff;
- decreased productivity and morale;
- the human aspect of pain and suffering.

Slips and trips¹ are the most common cause of major injuries at work and can happen almost anywhere with 95% of major slips resulting in broken bones. They can also be the initial cause for a range of other types of accident such as a fall from height. Slips and trips are responsible for, on average:

- over a third of all reported major injuries;
- 20% of over-3-day injuries to employees;
- * two fatalities per year;
- 50% of all reported accidents to members of the public that happen in workplaces;
- cost to employers £512 million per year (lost production and other costs);
- cost to health service £133 million per year;
- incalculable human cost;
- more major injuries in manufacturing and in the service sectors than any other cause.

¹ The NASC wishes to thank the HSE for the use of their guidance document/website in the preparation of this NASC Guidance.
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/introduction.htm>



Figure 1 & 2 – Typical pictures of cluttered walkways, uneven scaffold boards, trailing electrical leads etc.

3. RISK MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

There are many ways in which workplace design and environment can contribute to slip and trip hazards. There is plenty of scope for designing and maintaining the workplace in a way that will eliminate, or at least greatly reduce, the chances of someone having a slip and trip accident on the same level.

Follow the general risk management procedure, using these steps:

- Identify hazards likely to cause slips and trips on the same level; by examining the premises and the work;
- Assess the risks these hazards create by working out how serious the problems are and how often the problems might occur;
- Eliminate or control the risks by making changes to protect people;
- Monitor and review.

NOTE: Risk Management will not only include construction sites, but will also include the risks of slips and trips in the yard and offices (more information regarding the risks involved in office premises can be found in the Reference section).

This general approach will provide guidance on how to deal with slip or trip incidents on the same level. The risk assessment process should give you the opportunity to identify other hazards. Please also refer to NASC Guidance: SG7 Risk Assessments & Method Statements.

NOTE: Where there are unresolved issues with the client's management of housekeeping, the NASC recommends that the risks of not managing slips and trips is immediately brought to the client's attention at senior or site manager level.

4. IDENTIFY WORKPLACE HAZARDS

Every workplace needs to be examined so that all potential causes of slips and trips hazards on the same level are identified. To assist in determining exactly where slips and trips on the same level are likely to happen, there are three easy steps to follow.

- 4.1 Consult with employees. Employers have a legal obligation to consult with employees when going through the steps of this process.

4.2 Inspect the premises. Checklists may be helpful in identifying the sources of typical hazards. A slip and trip on the same level checklist for a specific workplace can be developed. Start by making a list of the locations of concern. For each location, record anything that could be high risk. Ask employees for their input when preparing the checklist, as they will know about any potential risks from their experience of doing the task. Helpful information will be in records of previous risk assessments.

Pay particular attention to the following:

- scaffold access yard housekeeping;
- scaffold structures i.e. excess material, tools, equipment;
- security of scaffold boards;
- floors and grounds;
- housekeeping and cleanliness;
- cleaning and maintenance methods;
- stairs, ramps, sloping surfaces;
- walkways, lighting;
- tasks being undertaken;
- footwear.

High-risk areas are:

- where scaffold lifts / floors can become wet or oily;
- where external grounds are slippery or are uneven;
- sloping surfaces;
- work areas where lifting and carrying tasks (and some other manual handling tasks such as pushing and pulling) are performed;
- any area where the pace of work causes people to walk quickly or run;
- high pedestrian traffic areas;
- where there are constant changes to workplace conditions such as building sites;
- unfamiliar locations such as patient or client homes;
- accident locations that have not been secured and cleaned up;
- unlit walkways / work areas.



Figure 3 & 4. Loose material, insecure wooden frames, trailing cables etc.

4.3 Check records including incident and injury reports, near miss reports, workers' compensation claims, and workplace inspection checklists.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

Having identified any potential hazards, the risks arising from them should be assessed. Risk assessment involves determining the likelihood of an incident occurring, and the level of harm that could result. There is not likely to be any single cause for a slip or trip incident on the same level, and therefore each potential hazard needs to be assessed.

It is important to set a priority for the elimination of hazards. For example, the provision of good slip resistant footwear alone is not sufficient protection against slipping on smooth floors coated with oil or grease. The first priority should be to avoid the spills. If this proves to be impractical, suitable slip resistant flooring should be installed. Good footwear is also part of the solution. The most serious risks need to be dealt with first, i.e. hierarchy: PPE is always a last resort.

The risk assessment should provide detailed evidence about what contributes or could contribute to incidents involving slips and trips on the same level.

6. ELIMINATING OR CONTROLLING THE RISKS

Once a risk assessment has been completed, there are a number of ways to control the hazard. The table below identifies common hazards that are known causes of injury. Characteristics that make that hazard potentially dangerous are also identified. Eliminating the hazard is the preferred option as it removes all risk of injury. If this is not possible, then the hazard can be controlled to reduce the likelihood of injury in most cases, by simple, cost-effective strategies.

Introducing engineering alternatives, such as applying a non-slip coating to a slippery floor, or an administrative measure such as a maintenance / tidy up as you go policy or training strategy, may be a viable option. If all other solutions have been considered and are not practicable, then the provision of personal protective equipment, such as slip resistant footwear may be necessary to reduce the risk of injury posed by the hazard.

7. SUMMARY

The causes of slips and trips in the workplace are sometimes ignored on construction sites because the issues do not always indicate an instant dramatic incident or injury on site. We must all actively look to prevent the serious incidents in our workplace where someone could be exposed to a life threatening accident.

What we fail to see, in most cases, is that the cause and effect from someone slipping or tripping could lead to more serious conditions where someone may be exposed to a life threatening accident.

By eliminating unsafe conditions in the workplace that lead to slips and trips, we will all help to stop someone harming themselves or a fellow site worker. Everybody can help to break the links in the accident chain of a more serious incident by removing the hazards associated with slips and trips.

Common Hazards	Considerations	Potential Control Measures
Ground condition / working platform	Type / condition Gaps, lapped / loose boards Trap ends Spillage / excess material	Appropriate selection for prescribed work activity Monitoring, inspection / maintenance policy Signage, securing clips Suitable transoms / boards secured as appropriate Maintenance / housekeeping policy Clear as you go behaviour Exclusion zones Review of work practices
Material Handling	Uneven ground, distance	Manual handling awareness Unload / load material close to task
Stairs	Design / gradient	Handrails / ramps, staircase to be considered as first choice Lighting
Obstacles	Obstruction to common walkways	Storage facilities / workplace design Clear / clean workplace policy Systematic / regular housekeeping
Uneven surfaces	Change in surface texture / gradient Outdoor paving / car parks	Warning signs Handrails Define walkways Allowance for weather conditions Lighting
Office / crew cabin furniture	Broken Inappropriate use	Maintenance policy Provide stable steps for climbing
Weather Conditions	Entrance ways, car parks, pathways Ice, humidity, rain	Maintenance policy Inspection policy as appropriate Gritting Warning signs Maintenance protocol
Footwear	Slips, penetration wounds	Slip resistant sole material with a good tread pattern, rounded heel edge with good area of contact and a cushioned sole Ankle support i.e. laced safety boots not Rigger Style A close but comfortable fit relevant to the tasks i.e. safety boot, toe protectors etc.

Table 1 – Suggested control measures

8. REFERENCES, LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974;

HSE Information Sheet: Slips and trips: The importance of floor cleaning

HSE Technical Information Sheet: GEIS2 Accessing the slip resistance of flooring

HSE Guidance: INDG225 Preventing slips and trips at work

HSE Website: <<http://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/>>;

HSE Website: <<http://www.hse.gov.uk/watchyourstep/about.htm>>;

HSE Website: <<http://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/campaign.htm>>;

NASC Guidance: SG7 Risk Assessments & Method Statement;

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999;

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992.

See also:

- geis2 Assessing the slip resistance of flooring (HSE Guidance)
- indg225 Preventing slips, trips and falls at work
- slips02 Slips, trips and falls HSE Information Sheet

Whilst every effort has been made to provide reliable and accurate information, we would welcome any corrections to information provided by the author which may not be entirely accurate, therefore and for this reason, the NASC or indeed the author cannot accept any responsibility for any misinformation posted.



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