

THE BFAWU GUIDE TO REDUCING SLIPS, TRIPS & FALLS

One third of all workplace accidents are directly attributable to slips, trips and falls and in the food industry this type of injury contributes up to half of all major injuries. Every year we process thousands of claims for members who have suffered injuries caused by this totally avoidable group of hazards.

With a little time, thought and commonsense, this type of accident could be greatly reduced.

Better housekeeping, improved storage and improved safety footwear are three areas that readily spring to mind as measures that could cut both the human and economic costs of accidents, but are three areas that are so often overlooked.

There are three pieces of legislation that place a general duty on employers to reduce the risk of accidents to their employees, including slips, trips and falls.

- **Health & Safety at Work Act 1974**, which requires the employer to ensure the safety of all who are affected by their work.
- **Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1992**, which emphasise the need for the employer to carry out risk assessments and to have effective control measures in place. It also includes the need for effective planning, control measures, continuous monitoring and a reviewing process that evaluates the measures that have been adopted to reduce the risks.
- **Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations 1992**, which places specific duties on the employer such as, organised traffic routes where pedestrians operate, barriers on areas above two metres to prevent falls from height, suitable flooring for the operation that is carried out to prevent slips, good housekeeping policies with clearly designated areas for waste disposal and buildings that are easy to clean and maintain.

In reality it will always be easier to identify the causes of accidents within the branch, as opposed to someone removed from the problem trying to carry out some form of detailed analysis outside of the workplace, based on statistics. In order to ensure success you will need to follow 5 basic steps:

1. **THE PLAN** – Identify where slips, trips and falls occur, talk to the workforce, look at past records, set measurable targets and remove the hazard immediately where possible. At the very least we should be ensuring that the employer does everything possible to reduce the risks to their lowest level before other control measures are considered.
2. **CONTROL MEASURES** – Taking time to analyse methods of reducing the risks can significantly reduce the accident rate. Safer working practices, improved environmental hygiene, better use of work equipment and suitable training can all play a major role in minimising the risk of slip, trip and fall injuries.
3. **ORGANISATION** – By ensuring that everyone, including the workforce is involved in the decision making process, the chance of accident reduction is greatly enhanced. Clear procedures that designate the roles of individuals and their responsibilities within the organisational set-up will have a lifting effect on the safety culture. Confusion causes accidents!

4. CHECKING – Are the procedures being carried out as designed? Are there records kept to aid future assessment? Also look to report back on the successes and the failures of the systems. Advertising the successes will demonstrate to the workforce a feeling that their welfare is important and will promote a better safety culture. Reporting the failures will show that if it goes wrong it will not be brushed under the carpet, but will need another approach and is likely to encourage worker participation in seeking continued improvement.

5. REVIEW – If measurable targets have been set then it will enable detailed evaluation to take place. Have the hazards been permanently removed? Have accidents been reduced? Is there a continued dialogue with the workforce in an effort to solve the problem areas?

Of course reducing slips, trips and falls is not just about good hygiene practices, storage and policies there are many other factors that can contribute to this major problem.

- **The environment** – The effects of heat, humidity, cold, wet and dust on the workplace and how they interact with the normally safe working areas and practices. The work area should be well lit and free from rubbish at all times, as should the means of access and egress.
- **Flooring and Stairways** – Is the flooring suitable for the type of work that is being carried out? Are absorbent mats needed in areas where spills are a regular occurrence and do they create their own tripping hazard? Are stairways fitted with non-slip mats, handrails and kept free from obstruction? Are there warning signs pointing out raised flooring or steps?
- **Maintenance** – Besides the obvious benefits of an effective cleaning programme, other maintenance is essential if we are to reduce accidents. Replacement of broken tiles on the floor that can contribute to trips, repair to leaks in roofs and machinery, cleaning and replacement of workplace lighting.
- **Personal Protective Equipment** – As in all risk assessing PPE should only be considered when all the other control measures have been explored as it does not eliminate the risk. Safety footwear can be of real benefit not just in preventing foot injuries, but also in preventing slips at work. Safety footwear should be suitable to the wearer, suitable for the work surface and should be properly maintained and replaced when necessary.

By adopting these simple measures we should see a significant reduction in the instances of slip, trip and fall accidents, whilst developing an increased awareness of the health, safety and welfare standards needed to make a safer workplace.

Further information is available from your local Regional Office.

THE BFAWU WORKING FOR A SAFER WORKPLACE