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# Preventing Slip-Fall Injuries in the Workplace

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> Scot Young Research Ltd

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# Introduction

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Trips, slips and falls are by far the most common cause of injury in UK workplaces every year, accounting for about a third of all non-fatal injuries to workers. Although incidents may be fairly minor, many will experience more debilitating injuries, with 95% of major slips resulting in broken bones or fractures. Slips and trips have also be pinpointed as an initial cause behind some of the more serious harm in workplaces, such as falls from height, which 25% of all workplace fatalities a year can be attributed to.



Being injured in a slip, trip or fall can cause a lot more problems than just physical pain. Countless individuals and families suffer every year as a result of this kind of accident, as many accidents may leave victims unable to work. More than 30% of all major, debilitating occupational injuries can be attributed to slips, trips and falls, with a total of 6.3 million working days are lost due to workplace injuries every year in the UK.



Although, of course, the health and the safety of individuals is the most important thing, if a slip and fall accident occurs at the workplace it could cost businesses a lot of money. Slip and trip accidents are costing businesses an estimated £500 million a year, taking into account not only money paid to the victim – in insurance or even lawsuits should the employer be found to be negligent and liable for the incident – but also through absenteeism, any damage to equipment or infrastructure and even loss of business should the incident harm brand reputation.

## > CAUSES OF STFS

There can be a number of different causes of slip, trip and fall incidents in workplaces, but generally most can be attributed to health and safety oversights, poor housekeeping or problems with the building itself. This may be in relation to obstructions and other trip hazards on busy walkways, or due to more infrastructural issues such as lack of adequate lighting or poor floor quality, the latter of which is frequently regarded as the most common cause of slips and falls, with uneven, worn or very smooth surfaces often being a significant safety hazard.



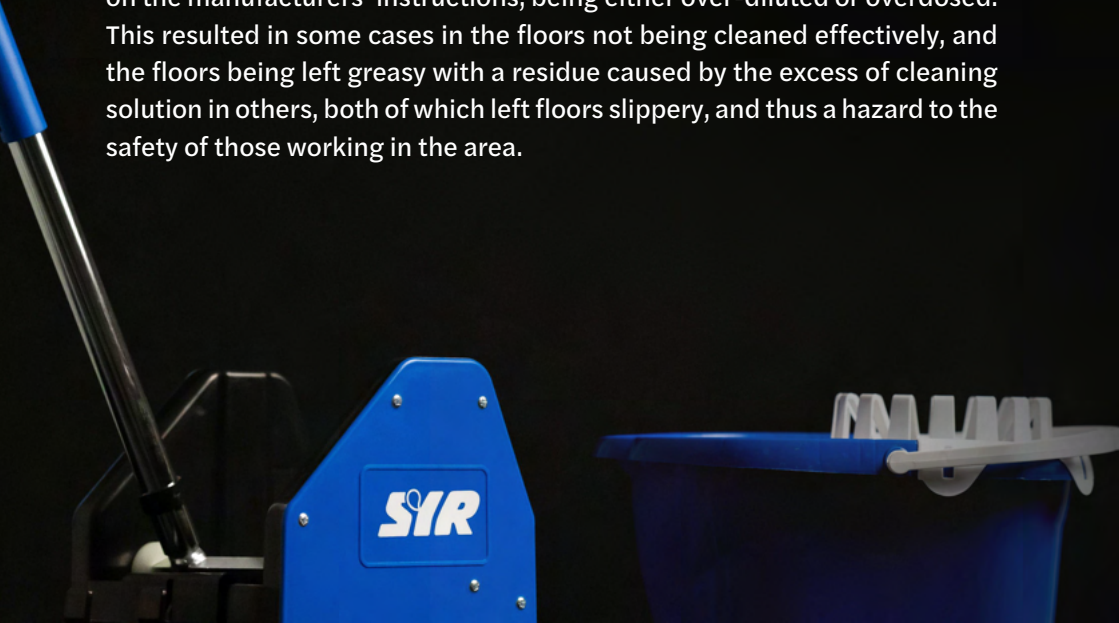
Lack of sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE), staff equipped with unsuitable clothing or improper tools for either the task or the environment itself, is another common factor in many workplace accidents. This is not just limited to slip, trip or fall injuries; indeed, use of incorrect equipment can result in very serious injuries, depending on the level of risk, as the purpose of PPE is to reduce the danger of existing hazards. For instance, whilst, as was said previously, unsafe floors are the most common cause of slip and fall incidents, unsuitable footwear or shoes that do not offer sufficient grip have been pinpointed as the second most common, usually maximising the risks of certain types of flooring.



## > ROLE OF CLEANING

Cleaning is essential for preventing slip fall injuries, as it removes spillages, breakages and contamination that would make floors unsafe or lead to accidents, but the cleaning process can also be identified as a major cause of the hazards themselves. This is not just limited to floors remaining wet or damp after being left to air dry after mopping, although that is an easy way of creating a slip hazard from cleaning; but rather, mistakes made during the cleaning process can leave a slippery residue on floors that has the potential of causing accidents to cleaning operatives and members of the public alike.

The hazards associated with the use of chemicals used for cleaning have been highlighted many times: these often volatile products have the potential to result in harm to both users and others, causing irritation and injury to anyone who comes into contact with them. Direct contact isn't the only way that cleaning chemicals can cause injury, as the incorrect use of such solutions when cleaning can often impair floor safety. In one study assessing the cleaning procedures of a number of restaurants, the cleaning solutions used to clean floors, including degreasers and neutral floor cleaners, were rarely found to have the concentration recommended on the manufacturers' instructions, being either over-diluted or overdosed. This resulted in some cases in the floors not being cleaned effectively, and the floors being left greasy with a residue caused by the excess of cleaning solution in others, both of which left floors slippery, and thus a hazard to the safety of those working in the area.



## > SOLUTIONS

It is impossible to completely eliminate all instances of slip, trip or fall injuries in any environment, due the range of reasons why these individual accidents may occur. In many cases, accidents are a result of physical factors related to the individual – for example, older people and people with mobility or vision difficulties are far more likely to experience this kind of incident, and are also more likely to suffer from more serious injuries as a result. It can also be difficult in some settings to totally control environmental factors that may cause floors to become risky, such as in very crowded environments with high footfall or in extreme conditions.

Even with these external factors causing difficulties it is still vital that businesses and cleaning teams do all they can to minimise risks in order to keep staff, customers, service users and other visitors to the premises safe. Training is highly important here, as ensuring cleaning operatives follow all regulations and procedures of best practice will prevent improper cleaning from creating any additional risks. Effective training is the best way for cleaning operatives to be informed of their duties and the processes that are required for it to be completed safely, as a lack of understanding can lead to inappropriate short-cuts, that may put both the operatives and anyone else nearby at risk of accidents such as STFs. A reported 7% of occupational injuries have been attributed solely to training issues, although the poor understanding of correct procedure is likely to cause a far greater number of incidents, such as through the misuse of cleaning chemicals.



## > SAFETY SIGNS

One of the most basic methods of defence against slip accidents, and one that is used all over the world, is the use of signage to warn of the presence of a risk. Some spillages may not always be visible to the naked eye, such as water, grease, wax or indeed residue left after improper cleaning techniques, and placing a very visible sign in the area can sometimes be the difference between an accident occurring and being prevented. Surveys have shown that lack of sufficient hazard identification, whether that be a caution sign or some other highly visible method of warning people of the presence of a hazard, is the primary cause of around 10% of slip and fall incidents, regardless of the environmental conditions, so taking even the small step of placing a sign to highlight an issue until staff are able to deal with it will make a difference to the overall safety of the premises. Safety signs, especially those that are tall and brightly coloured, can also be beneficial in preventing accidents amongst those with poor vision, one of the most at risk groups of slipping, tripping or falling.

Even if they are not a completely failsafe preventative method against slips, they are a good way of encouraging caution to those nearby. Safety experts have estimated that as much as 90% of all occupational accidents can be attributed to individual factors, namely the victim practicing unsafe behaviours that cause them to misjudge or not notice the hazard in question. Thus, this kind of incident cannot be completely avoided, as each person must use their own discretion to protect themselves from the risk, but safety signs serve as a reminder to everyone that there is a hazard nearby, hopefully inspiring them to model their behaviour accordingly.



SYR's range of caution signs and cones are internationally recognised as a high quality and dependable choice for warning against the presence of hazards, used in businesses and institutions all over the world. Made of a tough moulded polypropylene whilst still light and easy to transport, SYR signs are designed to be a valuable addition to any cleaning regimen, and a reliable way of helping to prevent accidents, including slips, trips and falls.

SYR's A signs, including the Safeguard Caution Sign, feature a patented design, a top slip to prevent the sign from tipping over when in use, a simple addition that improves its overall safety and reliability. Each sign is also complete with a high visibility print, created using a unique in-mould print injection to ensure high resolution images and prevent fading. Also available is the Safeguard-R, an alternative to the original Safeguard, featuring the same strong and durable construction, but made from 100% recycled materials. This innovative product, unique amongst its competitors on the market, is evidence that there is no need to sacrifice performance for sustainability when cleaning.

On many occasions, the hazards with the potential to cause slips, such as wet or contaminated floors and spillages of water and other substances, are not immediately visible even to those in the immediate vicinity. Thus, getting to the source of the spill as promptly as possible can often be the most important thing you can do to prevent accidents from occurring, particularly in busy environments like supermarkets, schools and hospitals. SYR's Rapid Response Cone is perfect for this. A durable yet lightweight safety cone, complete with high visibility print on all sides, this product comes fitted with sturdy, easy-glide castors, side tool holders and a convenient top handle. These features allow the tall safety cone to function almost as a small trolley, allowing cleaning operatives to wheel it into the spill zone fast, easily blocking off areas and warning those nearby of hazards without the need to carry heavy equipment back and forth.





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## Contact Us

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[syrclean.com](http://syrclean.com)

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Lye By-Pass, West Midlands,  
United Kingdom, DY9 8HG

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[contact@syrclean.com](mailto:contact@syrclean.com)

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+44 (0)1384 421421