

# Slips and trips

## Cleaning regimes

### Introduction

Cleaning is normally undertaken for two reasons, maintaining the appearance of a floor or for hygiene purposes. Cleaning also has an important role in preventing slips and trips; done well it can help to reduce the risk but done badly it can increase the risk. Cleaning should therefore be carefully considered both as a control measure and as a potential source of risk.

### Trips

Cleaning is an important element of good housekeeping, which is essential for eliminating trip hazards. However, a lot of the equipment used for cleaning has the potential to introduce a trip hazard, so plan carefully. Equipment such as vacuums and floor polishers often have trailing cables, and these along with low lying items such as buckets and even warning signs, can present a trip hazard. Minimize the length of trailing cables by plugging into the nearest socket and keep walkways free of obstructions during the cleaning process.

### Slips

If smooth floors become contaminated, they can be very slippery. Cleaning should not be used as the primary means of preventing slips if you can prevent contamination, but cleaning can help manage the risk. Even slip resistant flooring can lose its performance if dirt is allowed to build up on the surface.

If a floor is slippery when wet, then using a wet cleaning process (for example, mopping) will increase the slip risk until the floor is completely dry. Even a well wrung mop leaves enough water on a floor to cause a slip. Avoid using wet cleaning techniques where you can, often a floor is at its most slippery when it is being cleaned.

Do not spread spills on smooth flooring, just dry them with absorbent material (e.g. paper towel). Keep people off the wet floor as it dries or dry it completely before people are permitted to walk on it.

Think about how and when to undertake cleaning to ensure it effectively removes the contamination and that any risk introduced by the cleaning regime is properly managed.

### Types of cleaning

People often refer to three different types of cleaning:

- > Routine cleaning – Regular, planned cleaning activities to maintain the floor.
- > Deep cleaning – More intensive cleaning used periodically to restore a heavily soiled floor.
- > Reactive cleaning – Immediately cleaning up an isolated spill.

In terms of floor cleaning and the prevention of slips, aim to adequately remove contamination using reactive and routine cleaning, making deep cleaning unnecessary.

### Cleaning needs to be well planned and managed

Make sure that the right tools for the job are available and use them correctly. The tools and techniques needed will depend on the floor surface and the contamination. Different cleaning techniques may have to be used for reactive and routine cleaning, so consider both. The technique used to clean a floor can be just as important as the chemical selected.

Consult the flooring manufacturer's information for their recommended technique. If cleaning chemicals are used, refer to the manufacturer's information and instructions to make sure it is suitable and to establish what equipment (including PPE) is needed for its application and removal. If cleaning machinery is used, ensure the operators are trained to use it correctly.

## Slips and trips - Cleaning regimes

Consider providing slip resistant footwear to cleaning staff as they will have to access the floor during the cleaning process. More information on choosing slip resistant footwear can be found in Risk Essentials - Footwear. Review how it is intended to prevent other people walking on any smooth floors that get wet during the cleaning process. Barriers are much more effective than warning signs at keeping people off contaminated areas. Cleaning in sections, letting each one dry completely before moving to the next, can keep people off the wet floor whilst allowing access to other parts of the site.

Consider where to store cleaning equipment; it should be easily accessible when needed but secured when not in use. Review the location of water sources, drains and power outlets when planning cleaning regimes.

### Cleaning techniques - Wet contaminants

Wet contaminants can usually be dried up easily using a paper towel or wet vac. Avoid increasing the slip risk by wet mopping and spreading the spill. Ensure the floor is left dry after cleaning or that access to the floor is prevented until the floor has completely dried.

### Cleaning techniques - Dry contaminants

Dry contaminants, such as dust, can usually be removed with a vacuum cleaner or microfiber mops, avoiding the need to wet the floor.

### Cleaning techniques - Oil and grease

A detergent solution will be necessary to successfully remove oil or grease from a floor. The solution must be diluted to the correct concentration. One way to control the concentration of detergent in the solution is to provide a measure and mark the fill level in the bucket. Apply enough solution to remove the grease and allow it time to act on the contamination. Even a minute of contact time with the floor can make a big difference to the amount of grease removed. Scrubbing can help release contamination from a floor with a very rough surface. A dry mop or wet vac should be used to remove as much of the solution as possible.

Allowing the solution to air dry will leave the grease and cleaning chemicals on the floor as the water evaporates and is one of the most common mistakes that leads to residues on floors after cleaning.

### Good cleaning practices

Cleaning activities need to be carefully planned so that they don't put people at risk. Try to undertake cleaning at quiet times (e.g. outside business hours) to minimize disruption and risk. It is important that everyone involved in the cleaning process is suitably trained and are provided with the equipment and time to undertake cleaning effectively.

Cleaning equipment, such as mops, will themselves need to be cleaned to prevent them spreading contamination around. Mop heads can go in the washing machine. The condition of cleaning equipment should be monitored, and it should be cleaned and/or replaced as necessary.

Cleaning staff should be supervised to ensure that they are following the cleaning procedures correctly.

Empowering cleaning staff by emphasizing their importance in preventing falls can help ensure that cleaning is a task which is undertaken with pride rather than being the least appealing part of someone's job.

Observe the cleaning processes on a regular basis to ensure that the cleaning regimes are being followed. If they are not, don't assume the cleaner is to blame; it may not be possible for them to follow the prescribed cleaning regimes given the equipment, time or training they have. If your cleaning processes are not being followed, revise them so that they can be followed and make sure cleaning staff understand why they have been asked to clean that way. This reduces the chance of them taking shortcuts that undermine safety (see Risk Essentials - Human Factors).

### Beware!

It is important to bear in mind that polishing and buffing can make floors more slippery.

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