Slips and trips
Managing trips

Introduction

Slips and trips have different causes which will require different solutions if falls are to be prevented. Trips tend to result in a person falling in the direction they were walking as their foot stops unexpectedly. This guide is designed to help you assess the risk of a trip in the workplace and to think about suitable controls to reduce risk.

There are two common factors that lead to a trip:

> An obstacle in the pedestrian's path

> A failure to see the obstacle

Most workplaces have trip hazards; some should not be there and could be easily removed (e.g. bags or packaging materials), whereas others are more difficult to remove (e.g. single steps). Uneven surfaces, temporary obstacles and changes in level can all interrupt a pedestrian's stride and cause them to trip. The minimum distance between the foot and the floor when walking is usually called toe clearance.

Toe clearance varies between individuals and with age. Research suggests that even an obstacle or change in level that is 10 mm high can present a trip hazard. Bigger obstacles present a greater risk of a trip, if people don't notice them.

Research also suggests that toe clearance decreases with age, so minimizing or eliminating trip hazards is of particular importance in locations where there is a high proportion of elderly pedestrians. Pedestrians with visual impairments may have difficulty seeing trip hazards putting them at greater risk.

As a starting point for risk assessing trips, highways engineers tend to use a difference in level of 25 mm as a trigger for taking action to remove a trip hazard. However, they also consider how busy an area is and who uses it to determine whether a different action point would be more appropriate.

It is important to bear in mind that trips don't just happen during normal walking (pedestrians can trip whilst stepping backwards or manoeuvring) and the positioning of a trip hazard and the activities being undertaken in the vicinity will have an influence on the risk that it poses.

Assess the risk

It is important to understand the trip risks in a workplace. A suitable and sufficient risk assessment should be undertaken to identify potential trip hazards and suitable control measures to minimize the risk.

Consider the people who are likely to be exposed to the trip hazard and consider whether their capabilities or the tasks they are performing increase the risk.

An example of a high-risk task is carrying objects, especially in both hands. This can significantly increase the risk of a trip, as it can impair a person's view of the ground in front of them, affect their balance and limit their ability to recover from a fall.

Eliminate All Unnecessary Trip Hazards

All workplaces contain objects that could present a trip hazard if left in pedestrian walkways. By maintaining good housekeeping standards and a culture of responsible working, trips can be prevented.

Be proactive in identifying and removing temporary trip hazards and encourage your colleagues to do the same. Suitable storage and waste disposal facilities will be needed to keep the workplace tidy. Ensure matting does not curl up, becoming a trip hazard.

Dealing with non-removable trip hazards

Some trip hazards may be part of the fabric of your building or an integral part of your equipment and so cannot be easily removed. Consider using overhead or underfloor cable runs and compressed air supply lines.

In instances where it isn't practical to remove the trip hazard, think about how to minimize the risk. To stop people walking over the trip hazard erect a barrier around it or install a raised walkway over it. Use visual contrast and suitable lighting to make obstacles and changes in level more visible

Where a trip hazard has arisen from damage to walkways or poor maintenance of machinery, identify these issues quickly and get them fixed. A quick and simple hazard reporting system will help the staff working in the area to bring up any problems they have noticed. Make sure that reports are followed up, even if the defect can't be fixed right away. Reporting will probably stop if individuals feel that nothing is done in response to their report.

Plan work activity

Good planning can greatly reduce the risk of a trip accident; many trips accidents occur whilst climbing over equipment or stored items. Plan work and storage so that everything has a place and is easily accessible. It is a good idea to define walkways, work areas and storage areas so that the workplace does not become untidy. Ensure walkways are free from slip or trip hazards.

Lighting and visibility

Trip hazards can be difficult to see if they are not well illuminated. Make sure the workplace is well lit. Use visual contrast to help distinguish trip hazards from the surrounding floor surface. You should have a light reflectance value (LRV) difference of at least 20 LRV between the object you are aiming to highlight and its surroundings, with 30 LRV being a better contrast to aim for.

Equipment specification, design and installation

Consider the trip risk when buying, designing and installing new equipment. Is it possible to reduce the risk of a trip accident by using cordless tools for instance that can eliminate trailing cables. The positioning of equipment and the way they are powered, drained and operated can have an influence on trip risk.

QBE Canada - Toronto
6 Adelaide St E
7th Floor
Toronto ON M5C 1W4
Canada
+1 416 682 5930
QBEcanada.com

QBE Canada - Vancouver
1021 West Hastings St
Suite 1570
Vancouver BC V6E 0C3
Canada
QBEcanada.com

Registered in the Province of Ontario, Canada No. 002193827

632604/2312