



Preventing Slips, Trips & Falls in Contact Centres

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Introduction

Slips, trips and falls on the level are the most common cause of major injuries in workplaces and the second highest cause of over-three-day injuries. They can occasionally cause fatalities, e.g. through injury to the head.

The financial costs of slip and trip incidents for the UK are considerable and based on 2004 figures it is estimated that they cost employers some £512 million and the health service some £133 million per year.

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Slips, trips and falls can happen to anyone; however the statistical information suggests that it is older people and particularly women, who are often injured more severely. A simple trip can lead to severe injury or may result in death. Water spillage on to a smooth floor at the hospitality station could lead to a severe injury if it was not cleared up quickly.

Trip hazards are probably more prevalent than slips in the Contact Sector environment as there is a higher potential to have trailing wires to computer and telephonic equipment or personal belongings around desk legs.

Although the vast majority of people working in a Contact Centre are employees of the company there may well be contractors on site dealing with new installations, carpeting, lighting or sound systems and care must be taken to manage the work of contractors adequately.

Different shift patterns in Contact Centres can lead to a large number of people moving about the premises at the same time thus increasing the potential for slip, trip and fall incidents.

Slip, trip and fall incidents can be controlled, provided sufficient attention is given to the nature of the work environment and the organisation affords them sufficient importance.

The control measures needed are often simple and low cost, but applying them will bring about significant reductions both in human suffering and loss.

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Legal Requirements

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSW Act) requires employers to ensure the health and safety of their employees, others who may work on the premises and those who may be affected by their work activities. This includes taking measures to control slips, trips and fall risks. Under the HSW Act employees are required not to endanger themselves or others, to cooperate with their employers and to use any safety equipment provided by their employer.

Manufacturers and suppliers have a duty to ensure that their products are safe. Adequate information about the appropriate use of products must be provided. More recent regulations emphasise the importance of such measures.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to assess the risks (including slip, trip and fall risks) to their employees and other people (contractors, visitors to the premises etc.) arising from work activities. Contact Centre employers should be able to demonstrate that they have effectively considered the risks and instituted suitable control measures. They also need to ensure that the measures that they have taken are effective. They should investigate any significant slip, trip or fall incidents. Employees also have a duty to report any situation that might present a serious or imminent danger and they should also notify employers of any shortcomings in the health and safety arrangements.

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 contain requirements relating to the construction of floors and traffic routes and the need to keep them clean and free from obstructions.

The Contact Centre industrial sector is a rapidly growing business sector; therefore it is no surprise that the direction to take opportunities to eliminate slip, trip and fall hazards in any refurbishment or new building work is paramount. The work may well be subject to **Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 1994 (CDM Regulations)**. These Regulations will be replaced by the CDM2007 Regulations.

Safety representatives appointed under the **Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977** must be consulted on health and safety matters. They must also be given access to information relevant to the health and safety of the workers they represent, including any information relating to potentially hazardous conditions which might cause a slip, trip or fall.

The Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996 require employers to consult with workers, either directly or indirectly through elected representatives, on matters relating to their health and safety at work.

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Safety representatives can help employers with both the development and implementation of a slip, trip and fall risks policy. They will be able to identify risks in the workplace and bring the worker's perspective to the policy-making process.

Developing and implementing a successful policy to control slip, trip and fall risks will require the support of everyone including senior managers, employees, contractors and others associated with the business.

Since the size of Contact Centres differs widely some may wish to take a 'whole service' approach whilst others may wish to involve employees in a 'sectored' approach. In either case or a combination of the two, the suggestion made by several Contact Centre personnel (managers, supervisors, employees or union representatives) was to involve all staff in training sessions, practical discussions and team exercises on the risks and how they can be controlled. It was felt particularly important to include disability issues that affect employees, employers, contactors or visitors to the premises. Linking safety and risk assessment to team meetings was felt to be a positive approach to secure risk awareness.

Assessing slip, trip and fall risks

In order to effectively control slip, trip and fall risks, employers should:

- Identify the hazards – Carry out site inspections and look for hazards throughout the premises and around the site;
- Decide who might be harmed and how – look at who comes onto the site and whether they are at risk;
- Consider the risks and decide if precautions already being taken are enough or if more needs to be done;
- Investigate near miss reports;
- Run awareness, education and information campaigns;
- Record the findings;
- Review the assessment regularly and revise it if necessary.

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Contact Centre sites differ widely in their design or footprint. Some are extremely large having open plan floors, others are compact, some have partitions and yet others have segregated offices.

Activities on each site also differ in that some Contact Centres have a call-centred focus whilst others are combined with warehouse facilities. Each will need to be assessed separately and a range of practical measures adopted to control the risk depending on the assessment.

The risk factors to consider include:

- Environmental (floors, slopes, stairs, lighting, temperature, equipment etc.)
- Contamination (water, food, litter, bags etc.)
- Organisational (task, safety culture, communication etc.)
- Footwear (e.g. 'Sensible shoe' policy as part of DSE assessment)
- Individual factors (training, induction, exit interviews, information, supervision, workplace pathways etc.)

Control Measures

Contact Centre employers should consider these factors in order to determine how to manage slips, trips and falls. Some of the publications listed under 'Further reading' contain checklists to evaluate these factors in turn. A wide range of measures will be required to control the risks. Guidance on possible control measures for specific parts of contact centre premises or activities is given in Table 1.

Building design and layout

Where there are to be changes in the layout of premises or where new premises are to be built or are in the process of being designed employers should ensure that consideration is given to the elimination of slip, trip and fall risks. It is easier and cheaper to do this at the design stage than it is to retrofit after completion. For example it is usually possible to install a slip-resistant floor at a low cost when refurbishing or in any new build but this attracts a cost premium if installed after the work has been completed. A risk assessment should be carried out prior to any work being undertaken and action taken to eliminate the identified risks.

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Individual needs



Contact centres have a diverse workforce and it is therefore necessary for managers to consider individual needs. Some employees, contractors or visitors may have disabilities and arrangements will need to be reviewed in light of these disabilities. Further precautions may be required for people with disabilities, particularly for anyone unfamiliar with the premises and additionally to comply with the rights of the disabled. The duties of service providers under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 can be found at www.disability.gov.uk.

The potential for the employment of disabled people in Contact Centres is probably higher than any other business sector, particularly with the growth to date and the predicted future growth rate.

Visitors to the premises should be made aware of specific risks in particular areas.

Serving food and drink

The layout and service requirements provided at Contact Centres differ widely. Some provide rest rooms others snack bar facilities and yet others a full canteen service. In addition many provide hospitality areas where drinks and snacks can be obtained. Many slip incidents occur in kitchens and food-serving areas.

Although there are specific guidance notes for catering and food industries, the basic principles apply to all such service areas in the kitchen in that kitchen - type equipment and work surfaces should be suitable and be adequately maintained to avoid contamination of the floor surface. The floor surface must be appropriate for use in these areas.

Contractor safeguards

Managers and supervisors should decide what they need to do to manage and supervise the work of contractors who may be employed to undertake catering duties, clean the premises, install new technology or refurbish parts of the premises. In all cases they should agree with the contractor how the work is to be done and the precautions that will be taken to reduce the risk of slip, trip and fall incidents occurring.

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The most relevant issues include:

- What equipment should and should not be used;
- Personal protective equipment to be used and who will provide it;
- Working schedules and procedures;
- The number of people needed to do the job;
- Agreeing the reporting procedure for any incidents that occur;
- Training of employees
- Agreeing a communication strategy with the workforce.

Further information is available on the general health and safety responsibilities of clients and contractors. See *Use of contractors; A joint responsibility*.

Cleaning procedures

Detailed procedures for cleaning of spillages and carrying out routine cleaning of floors (including the selection and use of cleaning products appropriate to the surface and/ or finish; chemicals; and equipment such as appropriate PPE) should be in place.

Wet cleaning of floors routinely results in the presence of a very thin layer of cleaning solution on the floor which can often take over five minutes to dry, and can result in very slippery conditions which are often as bad as for a significantly wet floor.

To reduce the risk of slip, trip and fall incidents happening it is important to ensure that floors are dried as far as reasonably practicable after cleaning, before allowing pedestrians to walk on them.

Footwear

It is important to consider the use of footwear suitable for the purpose. Establishing a 'sensible shoe' policy (for example using a flat shoe when sitting at a Contact Centre station to promote good posture when looking at display screen equipment) has been shown to make a significant impact on reducing slip, trip and fall injuries. Ideally the policy should cover all employees and contractors.

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Lighting

Lighting is an important factor in preventing slips, trips and falls. Poor lighting can obscure hazards while excessively bright or incorrectly placed lights can cause glare and can again obscure hazards. This is picked up in Table 1.

Conclusion

Slips, trips and falls can be prevented by taking sensible measures. It does not follow that they are inevitable.

References

1. Use of contractors: A joint responsibility Leaflet INDG368 HSE Books 2002 ISBN0717627608

Further reading

- **Slips and Trips: Guidance for employers on identifying hazards and controlling risks** HSG 155 HSE Books 1996 ISBN 0717611450
- **Slips and trips: Guidance for the food processing industry** HSG 156 HSE Books 1996 ISBN 0717608328
- **Assessing the slipperiness of flooring - a technical information sheet** HSE
- **Preventing slips and trips at work** PDF Leaflet INDG 225(rev1) HSE Books single copy free or priced packs of 15 ISBN 0717627608
- **Preventing slips and trips in kitchens and food service** PDF Catering Information Sheet CAIS6 (rev1) HSE Books
- **Slips and trips: summary guidance for the food industry** PDF Food Information Sheet FIS6 HSE Books
- **LAC 94/2 Health and Safety guidance for contact centres** HSE/HELA
- **Workplace health, safety and welfare Approved Code of Practice L24** (ISBN 0-11-886333-9) incorporates the text of the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 and discusses the associated issues
- **Management of health and safety at work Approved Code of Practice** (ISBN 0-7176-2488-9) incorporates the text of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and discusses the associated issues
- **Safe use of work equipment Approved Code of Practice and Guidance L22** (ISBN 0-7176-1626-6) incorporates the text of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 and discusses the associated issues

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- **Display screen equipment work Guidance on Regulations L26** (ISBN 0-11-886331-2) incorporates the text of the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 and discusses the associated issues
- **Safety representatives and safety committees (Third edition 1996 L87)** incorporates the text of the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 and discusses the associated issues
- **The Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996**
- **VDUs an easy guide to the regulations HSG90** ISBN 0-7176-0735-6
- **Successful health and safety management HSG65** ISBN 0-7176-1276-7
- **Managing health and safety: Five steps to success INDG275**
- **Local Authority Circular 16/1 The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992** (available on line at www.hse.gov.uk/lau/lacs/16-1.htm)
- **5 steps to information instruction and training INDG213**

Further Information

Available from www.healthatworkcentre.org.uk

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/index.htm>

Good practice disclaimer

This guide has been prepared by the North-west Contact Centres Project in consultation with the Health and Safety Executive.

It should not be regarded as an authoritative interpretation of the law, but if the advice set out in the document is followed you will normally be doing enough to comply with health and safety law in respect of those specific issues on which the guidance gives advice. Similarly, health and safety inspectors seeking to secure compliance with the law may refer to this guidance as illustrating good practice.

The HSE believes that the contents of this guide demonstrate good practice in the industry and commends its use.

Good Practice Guidance note 25/04/07

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Table 1 Slip, trip and fall risk controls

Area	Practical measures for risk control
External areas (general)	Ensure regular cleaning and maintenance Remove/cut back foliage obstructions Remove moss/leaves/vegetation/mud from surfaces Have effective measures to deal with snow and ice
Areas used by vehicles (general)	Provide dedicated pedestrian walkways that are well signposted for user and vehicle driver Install pedestrian crossing areas where necessary Use clear road, path and bay markings Maintain road and pathway surfaces to ensure that they are not uneven or pot-holed Have a regular cleaning programme Insist on speed restriction appropriate to the site
Vehicle parking and delivery areas	Segregate HGVs from the employee car park Avoid changes in levels and awkward kerb angles or heights. Ensure that only authorised personnel gain access to the delivery/loading areas
External steps and paths	Pay attention to drainage of water and fall of path surface Avoid wooden steps outdoors Ensure that the steps and paths are suitable for the volume of pedestrian traffic Ensure that the path and step surfaces are flat and even Provide handrails where appropriate Pay attention to particular workforce requirements Mark the nosing of steps using anti-slip coating
Entrances	Provide suitable safety mats Ensure that any water deposited on dry areas is cleaned up quickly Provide handrails where needed Provide disability access Ensure that entrance door mechanisms can cope with the pedestrian traffic volume at all times Entrances to the buildings should be clearly marked for access by different categories e.g. Workforce access, visitor access (reception), delivery access etc. Display signs warning of hidden steps/changes in level and mark with hazard warning tape Display signs warning of risk of slipping when appropriate

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Table 1 Slip, trip and fall risk controls (contnd)

Area	Practical measures for risk control
Lighting (general)	Provide suitable lighting – repair or replace lights as necessary and clean lights regularly
Indoor flooring (general)	Provide a suitable floor surface for foreseeably wet or contaminated areas, e.g. kitchens, canteens and toilets Replace worn or damaged floor coverings Avoid storing materials on the floor
Internal stairs, slopes and corridors	Ensure that they are clear of obstacles and that any planters are positioned so as not to be a trip hazard Ensure that planters have suitable means to arrest spillages of water when watering Stagger shift end patterns if possible where the contact centre employs a large number of people Put in place traffic streaming and flow management for up/down stairs and along corridors at busy periods Mark the nosing of steps and stairs using anti-slip coating and clearly mark the edges of slopes Provide suitable handrails
Office areas (general)	Ensure that there is sufficient movement area around desks and that the floor area is uncluttered Avoid trailing cables – use cable covers or integral desk design Provide adequate storage areas for personal articles such as coats, bags etc. Ensure good housekeeping around printers and photocopiers Avoid storing materials on the floor Remove obstructions to movement

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Table 1 Slip, trip and fall risk controls (contnd)

Area	Practical measures for risk control
Contact Centre	<p>Ensure that chairs do not present a trip hazard when not in use and when in use due to poor positioning of workstations</p> <p>When ladders are in use provide adequate signposting and guarding</p> <p>Ensure that promotional material does not pose a trip or fall hazard nor does it pose a risk to head injury due to poor positioning</p> <p>Ensure that there is a wet area for umbrella storage</p>
Cleaning (general)	<p>Have a regular cleaning and maintenance programme</p> <p>Clean spillages immediately and leave floor dry</p> <p>Use safe cleaning methods</p> <p>Clean floors when staff are not present to reduce the risk</p> <p>Ensure that cleaning regimes are conducted so as not to wet all the floor at the same time – use coned areas for passage</p> <p>Display suitable warning signs when cleaning and remove them when cleaning is complete</p>
Kitchens/Canteens	<p>Ensure that all staff wear suitable footwear</p>
Refreshment/hospitality areas	<p>Avoid overcrowding by staggering refreshment times/shifts</p> <p>Ensure that areas are of a size that allows ease of access</p>
Events	<p>Make additional arrangements for removal of waste/litter at set up, throughout the event and afterwards</p> <p>Provide sufficient lighting during set up and dismantling periods</p> <p>Ensure that any temporary cabling is routed safely and identified as such</p>
Toilet accommodation	<p>Ensure that there are adequate numbers of toilets for the number and sex of staff</p> <p>Clean and remove sanitary/paper towel bins as frequently as required</p>

Based on a workshop on Slips, trips and falls undertaken by the North West Contact Centre Project and including representatives from contact centres, trade unions, regulators from Local Authorities and the HSE, and the private sector.