



FLOORING

Floor Safety 101

BY MICKIE BOLLINGER

When examining facility safety, floors are a good place to start. Since just about every contaminant will ultimately end up on the floor, finding a way to contain moisture, dirt, and debris before they cause slips, trips, and falls will have a positive impact on facility safety.

Many facilities underestimate the true cost of slips, trips, and falls. According to the CDC, the average price that a business pays out for a slip and fall claim is \$30,000 to \$40,000. Additionally, intangible things like productivity losses and negative publicity also need to be considered. Over one million people each year go to the emergency room after slip and fall accidents, reinforcing the principle that the price of prevention is lower than the price of reaction.

Universities are a perfect example of the critical relationship between floors and facility safety. A campus environment has many different types of buildings with thousands

of people coming and going constantly. After factoring in the social aspects of students chatting with each other, checking their phones, or rushing to their destinations, the potential for slips, trips, and falls grows.

Hazards can be hiding anywhere, but here are the top five risk areas for slips, trips, and falls in universities:

Main Entranceways

Along with large numbers of students and faculty, most of the dirt, moisture, and other debris in a facility comes in right through the main doors. There are surface changes when transitioning from outdoors to indoors, and there are often height differences, too. Safety

plans routinely point out that entry mats and rugs that are not firmly attached are potential trip hazards.

Cafeterias and Common Areas

Oils and other liquids from food preparation areas can be carried through cafeteria doors into central walkways, plus spilled food and beverages are an obvious concern. Communal areas in dormitories, libraries, student unions, and classroom buildings are also known for slippery messes. An often used “solution” here, rubber-backed mats, presents a different type of hazard when they are used in dormitories. Students can use them to prop doors open while bringing in groceries or moving, and that could allow unauthorized persons to enter the building.

Restrooms

Splashes of water from sinks and urinals are sure to leave puddles, and shower areas in dorms are another place where it is easy for water to get on the floor and cause a person

to fall. Operational issues like toilet backups and burst pipes create slip and fall dangers, too, if not managed properly.

Maintenance and Receiving Areas

These zones are used to store and transport materials for repairing and remodeling buildings as well as materials for maintaining the grounds of the university. They see substantial amounts of wheeled traffic that can pick up and flip the heaviest of rubber-backed mats. Another hazard that comes with day-to-day university operations is dry debris such as drywall dust. Fine dust on a smooth floor is difficult to see and a recipe for slips and falls.

Sports Facilities

Most sports facilities have smooth concrete or other high-gloss flooring systems that become extremely hazardous when wet or dusty. Locker rooms and training rooms can be wet and humid, and they experience

heavy foot traffic. Cleats also factor in because there is even less surface contact from foot to floor and more potential for slips and falls. Spectators and fans are another consideration, as supporters of the visiting team are usually not familiar with the facility, making signage and other precautions more important. Add in spilled beverages and food from concession areas and slips and falls are waiting to happen.

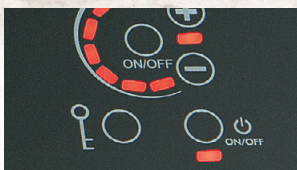
Until recently, there were no truly effective floor safety solutions that reduced slips, trips, and falls on smooth floors. Rubber-backed mats are somewhat effective against slips, but their shifting, flipping over, and bunching make them a trip hazard, and they don't have a lot of absorbency. Adhesive-backed absorbent mats hit the market about ten years ago, and they have revolutionized floor safety. The first mats were developed by a company called New Pig, located in Tipton, Pennsylvania. This type of mat absorbs water, oil, and grease and traps dirt and salt to keep it from being tracked around.

Facilities that have switched to adhesive-backed mats have reduced slip and fall claims by up to 90% while saving up to 50% per year on rental rug contracts. In today's economy, facilities are pressed to maintain a safe facility on a tighter budget. Such realities force facilities to re-examine common practices and make changes based on cost-to-benefit ratios. It is rare to find a new solution that makes an impact on safety while remaining affordable. The versatility of the adhesive-backed absorbent mat has been surprising—the absorbent technology, coupled with the ability to perform well on just about any commercial floor, makes it a win-win worth talking about.

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