

Focus on: Risk Management

Don't let costly slip and fall injuries trip you up

By Vern Putz Anderson and Barbara Mulhern

An employee slips on a wet floor — then falls and breaks her arm. Another employee looking for products on an upper shelf trips over some packing materials, falls and strains his lower back. And an older customer, who has difficulty seeing, falls over a shopping cart and dislocates his shoulder trying to catch himself.

These are just three examples of the many ways slip, trip and fall injuries occur at chain stores and in other retail operations. According to the 2008 Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index, falls on the same level resulted in \$6.4 billion in direct costs to employers to the United States in 2006. Falls to a lower level resulted in \$5.3 billion in direct costs to employers that year.

Within retail operations, recent data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) shows that employees experienced on average 22.2 days away from work per 10,000 employees in 2007 as a result of non-fatal falls on the same level. The number of lost workdays was significantly higher for certain establishments, workplaces or departments where meat products are handled. Similarly, stores in which pets and pet supplies are sold also have high rates of these types of costly injuries.

Experts say these injuries are not just a function of the type of work performed or business in which it is performed, but also a result of the type of floor surface.

When you combine work activity that may be considered 'messy' with floors that are often unsuited for the type of work performed, you have a recipe for more injuries.

Reducing the risk of costly slip, trip and fall injuries can positively impact your bottom line.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is working to educate store owners, operators and designers on how to reduce the risk of slip, trip and fall injuries. It recommends the following preventive measures:

- Identify the hazards. At least daily, have a knowledgeable supervisor or manager and/or your safety director conduct a "walk-through" of the site looking for trip hazards. To ensure a consistent survey, develop a simple checklist that can be used. Among the hazards that may be identified are floor obstructions; frayed edges of carpeting; potential slippery areas inside entrances with no runners or rubber mats; areas with spills that have not been marked off with cones or

Checklist for Investigating a Fall

Vern Putz Anderson, a public health adviser at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, advised that retail operators develop a simple fall-investigation checklist with these items:

- Consider the nature of the work activity that was taking place prior to the fall or near-miss fall. What was the employee doing or attempting to do? For example, was the employee carrying a large container that may have blocked his or her vision of the floor? Also consider how fast the employee was working and how long he or she had been working to determine whether fatigue may have been a factor.

- Consider the nature of the work environment. What are the conditions of the work area? Look

for such issues as lighting problems, including glare from the sun; changes in flooring height; the wrong type of flooring for the work being performed; and potential trip hazards resulting from poor maintenance.

- Consider the employee or customer who fell. For example, was the person "horsing around" or wearing footwear with worn soles? Is the person an older employee whose eyesight may be failing? Also, although this may be difficult to determine, it is recognized that certain medications can affect stability.

"Understand that the root cause of the fall may have been a combination of many factors," Anderson said. "And put preventive measures into place to minimize the likelihood of reoccurrence."

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caution tape; and “warning” signage and/or general poor housekeeping.

If you are constructing/designing a new store, walk through the property and consider such issues as the distance from the parking lot to the store, lighting (both indoors and outdoors), the type of floor material that will be used and the design of such work areas as meat departments to minimize products from dropping onto the floor.

If your managers aren’t experienced in conducting walk-throughs to identify safety hazards — or if you just want a “fresh set of eyes” — ask your insurance company’s loss control representative if he or she would assist with the walk-through as part of the price you are paying for your insurance premium.

- Develop a written slip, trip and fall prevention policy. State in your policy that your company believes that slip, trip and fall injuries can be prevented. Include both managers’/supervisors’ responsibilities (such as visual checks at the start of each workday

Web Resources

- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Among the many NIOSH resources are: www.cdc.gov/niosh (the NIOSH Web page — search under “All CDC Topics” for “slips and falls”) and the NIOSH Program Portfolio: Wholesale and Retail Trade, cdc.gov/niosh/programs/wrt, where you can link to such information as this NIOSH sector’s strategic goals and NIOSH Topics Pages (including “Falls from Elevation” at cdc.gov/niosh/topics/falls).
- NIOSHTIC-2 Database. Visit www2a.cdc.gov/nioshtic-2/default.asp, then search for “slips and falls” for additional NIOSH-supported materials.
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Federal OSHA, osha.gov, also has many good resources to help prevent slip, trip and fall incidents. Among them are the Safety and Health Topics pages on “Teen Workers — Potential Hazards — Slips, Trips and Falls” at osha.gov/SLTC/teenworkers/hazards_slips.html and “Walking/Working Surfaces” at osha.gov/SLTC/walkingworkingsurfaces/index.html, from which you can link to additional resources.

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to identify any slip, trip and fall hazards) and non-supervisory employees' responsibilities (such as practicing good housekeeping in their work areas at all times). Employers should always lead by example.

- Train your employees. Include in your training the following items:

- The content of your company's slip, trip and fall prevention policy.
- The fact that this policy was developed to help ensure the safety of both employees and customers.
- Specific slip, trip and fall prevention rules, such as prohibiting running, requiring employees to wear sturdy work shoes or boots with non-slip soles, requiring them to keep their work areas neat and clean, and requiring them to put back all items where they belong.

Make sure that your training is conducted in a language or languages and manner employees will understand. And be sure to keep written documentation of each training session.

- Ensure that you have the proper type of flooring. Consider such issues as traction, texture,

reflectiveness and light/dark patterns. Be aware that the natural properties of any surface can change substantially when people track in mud, snow, dirt and water. Floor slipperiness may also increase due to oil, grease or other substances and due to incorrect cleaning or waxing.

- Make use of non-skid floor mats and flush floor level runners. These are to reduce the risk of slips, trips and falls in potentially slippery areas. Good carpeting with bound edging will also help. It's important, however, to continually check for frayed edges, runners that no longer lay flat and tears due to excess wear.

- Establish a regular preventive maintenance program. Assign responsibilities for reviewing work site designs; the condition of all flooring and carpeting; lighting; and any floor obstructions that may be potential slip, trip and fall hazards. Follow up by making changes where necessary.

Vern Putz Anderson is a public health adviser at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Barbara Mulhern is a safety consultant.

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> Speakers

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Vice President, PC and Large Format Commercial Display Market Research
DisplaySearch

Keith Yanke

Director of Product Marketing
NEC Display Solutions of America, Inc.

Michael E. Zmuda

Director of Business Development
NEC Display Solutions of America, Inc.

> Webinar

Thursday, March 25, 2010
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