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FACILITY MANAGEMENT

Put Walkway Auditing to Good Use

You need to be proactive in floor safety. Walkway audits play a key role in establishing due diligence and in preventing slips and falls.

BY MICHAEL FRALEY

When it comes to slip-and-fall prevention and, really, safety in general, we hear a lot about the need for responsible companies to be proactive rather than reactive. Another term we may hear is due diligence. If either or both of these words are new to you, it probably means your company has never been involved in litigation on a safety matter. But if you are familiar with these terms, then you probably would agree on the need for a company to be proactive and to show proper due diligence in all of its safety efforts.

When it comes to floor safety, ask yourself this: "What can I do to protect my company from unwanted lawsuits that may result from a serious slip-and-fall accident? If litigation is initiated, can my company provide written documentation that outlines our proactive approach to floor safety? Will my current floor safety program (if there is one) show due diligence to a court of law?"

These are serious questions that need to be asked because statistics show slips and falls are a major problem for any business, small or large. Sadly, lawsuits seem to increase in a bad economy, while prevention efforts decrease because of budget constraints. And it's not that employers do not care about the safety of their employees or customers; they simply do not understand that spending money wisely on slip-and-fall prevention will save the company money rather than cost it money.

This article will show how being proactive could save your company thousands of dollars just by having a good program in place to prevent slips and falls. The article also will show how big a problem slips and falls are today.

Consider some statistics that drive home why preventing them

should be important to your company. According to the National Floor Safety Institute (NFSI), nearly 60 percent of all grocery store general liability insurance claims are slip-and-fall complaints. The nation's \$494 billion grocery store industry spends \$450 million annually just to defend such claims; NFSI reports slip-and-fall accidents in supermarkets are the leading cause of both employee and guest injuries.

Some other sobering statistics show slips and falls affect every industry. According to Liberty Mutual, 65 percent of all lost work days result from slips and falls, which in turn results in 95 million lost work days per year. In 2007, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated 2.2 million Americans sought emergency room treatment for an accidental fall, making falls the leading cause of emergency room visits in America.

Walkway Audits

Given these numbers, there should be no doubt slip-and-fall prevention should be taken seriously. What can a company do to prevent them? First, a company must come to realize it is a joint effort on the part of corporate management and the employees; if any of these is not truly committed, slips and falls will continue to occur.

Perhaps the best way to begin your prevention efforts is to have your facility's floor audited by a qualified walkway auditor who has been trained to test the floors' slip resistance and to identify potential slip, trip, and fall hazards. The process is called an audit because it provides a detailed written report, as well as diagrams of the facility with the current SCOF readings. These readings will identify floor areas with low, moderate, or high traction. The report also may include photographs that show potential hazards. By getting a true, unbiased report on the safety of your facility's walkways, you are being alerted to areas that pose a threat to not only your employees, but also your customers.

In December 2009, ANSI published the ANSI B101.1 standard, which addresses the measurement and categorization of the slip resistance of walkways as High Traction, Moderate Traction, or Low Traction. Floors that are categorized as High Traction present a low risk of a slip and fall, while Moderate Traction or Low Traction floors present an elevated risk. According to NFSI, High Traction floors have been clinically proven to reduce slip-and-fall claims by as much as 90 percent.

Once the audit has been performed, take action to raise the efficiency of the areas that showed Moderate or Low Traction. This can be done in a number of ways. The walkway auditor should include in his report suggestions for remediating the area in question. Once the floor's slip resistance has been raised to High Traction, then it should be priority one to maintain the floor's slip resistance at that safe level. Again, several processes and cleaners can help to raise and maintain a floor's slip resistance to a safe level.

Elements of a Floor Safety Program

The next step is a written floor safety program designed specifically for your company. Every company is different, and it is paramount that the floor safety program be designed for your company and your facility.

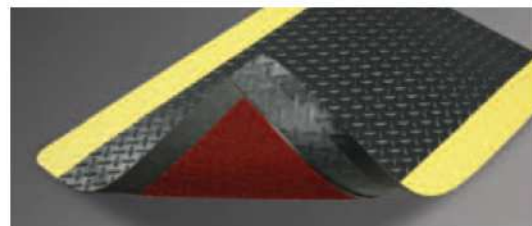
Even if your company has a safety program in place, a separate floor safety program should be a priority because it will reduce slip-



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and fall-incidents and also show due diligence if a lawsuit is filed.

To be effective, your floor safety program should include a number of key components that will work hand in hand:

- The walkway audit, followed by routine audits performed quarterly, or at least annually
- Training your employees in floor safety, which may consist of proper maintenance procedures, proper cleanup protocol, proper sign placement, and near-miss reporting
- Ensuring employees have the correct tools to complete the job, such as an adequate amount of “wet floor” signs, proper cleaning material, spill containment, and so forth
- Proper matting for entrances that will keep contaminants from entering the building and lowering the floors’ traction
- A good slip-resistant shoe policy in your program; even though you can’t require your customers to wear slip-resistant shoes, you can require this of your employees

If all of these elements are included in your company’s floor safety program, you can be sure the results will show in fewer slips and falls.

When an accident occurs, negligence is almost always asserted because most companies cannot show proof of their proactive ap-

proach to floor safety. Once litigation is initiated, the first thing an attorney will ask for once is a copy of your floor safety program.

They do this because they know most companies don’t have written procedures or protocols for addressing slip-and-fall prevention, and this is where negligence is often proven. On the other hand, when a company does have a written floor safety program and quarterly or yearly walkway audit reports, negligence is hard to prove — resulting in a much lower settlement, if any. Being proactive and showing due diligence is a must if a company hopes to win litigation when a slip and fall is involved.

OHS

If the main elements are included in your company’s floor safety program, you can be sure the results will show in fewer slips and falls.

Michael Fraley is President of Consolidated Safety Group, Inc., which is located in Henderson, Ky. He serves on the ANSI B101 Standards Main Committee and is chairman of the ANSI B101.4 Sub-Committee. He is an NFSI Certified Walkway Safety Auditor and an NFSI Certified slip-and-fall accident prevention specialist. Consolidated Safety Group, Inc. offers on-site nationwide walkway safety auditing, customized floor safety programs, and a complete line of floor safety products. To contact Fraley, call 888-818-9038 or visit www.walkwaysafety.com or www.floortesting.com.

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