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Slip-and-Fall Smarts

Martha Reynoso

Follow these guidelines to prevent injuries, reduce costs and focus on growing the bottom line

The restaurant industry has long known that slip-and-fall injuries pose a significant risk to their businesses. According to the National Floor Safety Institute, more than 3 million foodservice employees and more than 1 million guests are injured annually as a result of restaurant slips and falls. As of 2007, the industry spends in excess of \$2 billion on such injuries each year, and the number of injuries is projected to increase at a rate of about 10 percent annually.

According to the National Restaurant Association, slips and falls are the greatest source of general liability insurance claims within the restaurant industry. But the impact can be more far reaching.

It is critical for managers of restaurant facilities to limit their exposure to these accidents. In conjunction with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, ISSA, the leading trade association for the cleaning industry worldwide, developed a checklist to help restaurant facility managers lower their risks for slips and falls. By following these recommendations, restaurant facility managers can help ensure that energies and resources are properly dedicated to maintaining and growing their businesses' bottom line.

Flooring and Floor Coverings

- Select high-traction, slip-resistant flooring materials.

This is one of the best ways to avoid slip-and-fall issues and should be considered when you build, expand or remodel your facilities.

- Understand your floor materials' slip resistance.

Floor materials have an "out-of-the-box" slip resistance, or coefficient of friction (COF). COF levels will dictate proper cleaning and floor maintenance practices and should be audited after installation to confirm slip resistance.

- Ensure proper maintenance of carpet runners and mats.

Improper maintenance can create hazards, so it must be included in the housekeeping program. This includes inspection for the buildup of contaminants, as well as deterioration, which could lead to the creation of fall hazards. Consider using mats that have been certified by the NFSI.

- Limit the height difference between flooring surfaces and mats.

The difference should be no more than ¼ to ½ inch. Mats must be firmly secured to a clean, dry floor to prevent migration, buckling or curling. A change in position or deterioration in materials can create trip hazards.

- Use mats to prevent contaminants from reaching "front of the house" flooring.

A good mat program prevents the transmission of grease, water and other materials from the "back of the house" to the "front of the house" flooring, which would reduce slip resistance. Mats must be frequently inspected and checked regularly for wear and the buildup of contaminants.

Cleaning Products

- Use compatible, slip-resistant cleaning and maintenance products.

Your floor cleaning and maintenance products should have proven slip-resistance characteristics and be compatible with the particular flooring surfaces in your facility. NFSI provides material certifications.

- Ensure sufficient quantities of cleaning supplies are available.

Incompatible cleaning products should be removed or flagged for employees. Workers should understand the consequence of using improper materials and be instructed not to substitute with other materials or supplies.

- Provide “front of the house” and “back of the house” cleaning materials and equipment.

Having distinct supplies will reduce the likelihood of transporting a problem from one area to another. Color-coding materials can ensure proper use in the proper area of the facility.

Hazard Identification

- Know your facilities’ risk factors.

Regularly review all slip-and-fall incident reports to identify possible trends in location, time of day, etc., and consider possible preventive measures. Staff should also understand the importance of reporting incidents and conditions that could result in incidents, even if none have actually occurred.

- Institute a walkway-auditing program.

Walkway auditing is the evaluation and collection of data from testing a walkway surface to determine its slip resistance. Testing should be completed in a consistent manner and include more than a single set of measurements. Consider using NFSI Certified walkway auditors.

- Maintain open and clear communication.

Effective communication between the staff, cleaning personnel and walkway floor auditor is crucial to the identification of trends and elimination of factors that could reduce the slip resistance on floor surfaces.

Employee Training

- Institute comprehensive employee training programs.

Train employees on established spill prevention/response programs safety procedures, cleaning operations and inspection procedures geared toward your facilities’ risk factors.

- Understand proper product application and usage.

Employees must understand and reference manufacturer instructions for using various cleaning and maintenance products. They need to know where the materials are located, as well as how to use them in the event of an emergency.

- Train workers how to properly respond to slip-and-fall incidents.

You should also post written slip-and-fall prevention and accident-handling policies in conspicuous places.

- Keep a training log.

Maintain records of all employee training, including individuals trained, subject matter covered, training materials and date of training.

Employee Footwear

- Determine proper footwear for your facility.

Consider foreseeable conditions in the employee walking/working environment. Consult with a footwear supplier or manufacturer to select shoes that are the most appropriate for the situation.

- Establish appropriate footwear standards/requirements.

For those employees who may be exposed to oily, wet or otherwise slippery walking surfaces, provide access to slip-resistant footwear and make it a requirement.

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