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Slip & FALLS

Danny Koontz

Everyone in the facilities world deals with some aspect of slip and falls in and around their restaurants. We are all charged in some way with reducing claims and making our buildings safe for our customers and team members.

A well-coordinated plan, follow-through and teamwork among departments are critical to the success of your company's slip-and-fall program. Also, the combined efforts and follow-up communication with your guests give your company a way to assist the lifeblood of your company during a time of peril.

Case in Point

At Ruby Tuesday, our slip-and-fall program starts with training. We have videos on cleaning methods for both the back-of-house and front-of-house staff. Our safety and sanitation video is watched by all team members when they are hired and on a schedule as their employment continues.

We support the training videos with posters and stickers in the kitchen, reminding the team members of the importance of our processes and critical steps in the cleaning process that must always be followed.

Michael Barrett, director of risk management, said Ruby Tuesday's slips and falls have decreased significantly since 2007. One of the major reasons goes hand in hand with our team turnover, which is down. By retaining our employees and using the same people to do nightly cleaning, they become more educated in the process, thus delivering better results and consistency.

The Importance of Teamwork

Managing restaurants, satisfying guests and keeping a focus on safety can be a lot for a manager to handle. Build relationships with your vendors and let them assist you in reaching your goals. Our third-party chemical company also conducts quarterly field training in the restaurants, which helps to enforce the message of cleaning properly to prevent slip and falls.

We communicate frequently with our chemical company on what products match the types of floors or surfaces we have inside and outside our buildings in order to match the right product with the surface. The constant communication between your company and your chemical vendor increases the opportunity to drive results and reduces incidents.

For a facility's slip-and-fall plan to be successful, you need all departments to work hand in hand. In our company, the risk management, supply systems and facilities teams all work together to ensure a safe building for guest and team members. One department cannot do this alone; it takes teamwork.

Our risk management team tracks and identifies locations with a large number of slip and falls, and then reaches out to other departments for assistance in determining the cause of the issue. Some restaurants use their facilities audits or store inspections to identify possible problems and report those back to the team members in risk management. What matters is communication across the ranks on the issues and the opportunities that exist.

Other important items to consider to help reduce slip and falls include:

1 Have rock salt available to be purchased on your food trucks. If sudden snow hits northern locations, you can

salt the sidewalks for the guests if your landscape/snow removal company cannot get there fast enough.

2 Consider using a third-party company to clean your front-of- house floors in conjunction with carpet cleaning in certain locations where slip-and-fall opportunity is greater. As the carpet company already has a routine to come in regularly, ask them for a reduced price to clean the tile as well.

3 Place walk-off mats in transition areas.

4 Install clearly marked warning signs anywhere a change in surface height occurs.

5 Use different mats for rain and snow, and change them out regularly.

6 Ensure all team members wear slip-resistant shoes.

7 Talk to the tile manufacturers and get their input on your desired floor cleaning chemical.

Even though all procedures are in place and processes are followed, the opportunity for someone to slip or fall in your restaurant is always there.

The Ruby Walk

At Ruby Tuesday, we use the Ruby Walk: the opening manager for the day does a walk-through starting from parking lot to front doors to sidewalks then throughout the building. This gives the manager an opportunity to notice something that needs to be taken care of long before the first guest arrives.

For the outside of the buildings, focus on keeping the sidewalks clean, with mulch and rock pushed back into the landscaping and not on the sidewalk.

Frequently check the parking lot for small potholes and cracks, which could cause a customer or team member to fall. Keep parking lots striped and sealed on a schedule to help maintain a smooth surface.

Make sure all drains are in place and working correctly when it rains to keep large amounts of water from gathering around the building, giving someone the opportunity to slip. Keep the back dock and back door area clean and clear for vendors making deliveries.

When the Worst Happens

Being proactive helps prevent mishaps. However if a guest or team member should have an accident, the first and most important thing to do is have management comfort the guest or team member. Investigate what caused the incident. Was it a procedure that wasn't followed or is it a facility issue in or around the building that needs to be addressed?

The manager should gather all the information, and then turn the issue over to the appropriate department to handle. Remember, comfort the guest or team member, and do not make promises of what will be done. Evaluate the situation, and then if needed, seek advice from risk management or your superior in the field. Remember, the guest picked your restaurant to visit, so continue this courtesy if an incident happens by being alert, attentive and, most of all, hospitable.

By utilizing the resources available and taking a team approach, your organization can reduce slip-and-fall-claims and provide guests and team members with a safe experience.

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