

# 5.2 Preventing Slips: Cleaning



Cleaning is an important part of managing the risk from slips in any organisation and is vitally important when managing these risks in historic properties. Although it is often thought of a simple process and one that we all do at home, it is easy to get it wrong and end up with a cleaning system that does not help manage the risk of slips or worse, increases the risk.

## Introduction

Well-planned cleaning keeps flooring free from contamination and can significantly reduce the risk of people slipping. Conversely, poorly-planned cleaning can increase the risk of slips by leaving smooth floors wet and introducing trip hazards such as, waste materials and trailing cables from equipment.

Though cleaning is often seen as the least important part of someone's job, it is a critical one which needs appropriate planning, training, supervision and management.

## Best practice

These include:

- **Ensure that common contaminants are successfully removed by cleaning.** Where the contamination is usually water-based the cleaning process can be as simple as drying the floor. However, where greasy spills are anticipated (such as in kitchens and dining areas), a detergent solution will be needed to remove contaminants properly.
- **Check that detergent solutions are used correctly.** In order to remove grease, it needs to be made up at an appropriate concentration, a suitable volume of solution needs to be applied to the floor and the solution will need sufficient contact time with the floor – 30 to 60 seconds contact time can make a big difference.

- **Make sure that the detergent solution is correctly removed** after it has had sufficient contact time with the flooring. Usually, this can be achieved with a well-wrung mop, a separate clean mop head or a wet vacuum. If the detergent solution is allowed to air dry instead of being removed properly, it will deposit any contamination back on the floor as it dries and make the cleaning ineffective.



Many historic properties feature a cafe which can present a risk from spills.

- **Ensure that the cleaning system does not leave smooth flooring wet while people still have access to it.** Obviously, where cleaning leaves the flooring wet, this will increase the risk of slips until it becomes completely dry. Many floors only get wet when they are being cleaned, and therefore present an increased slip risk during that time. Where possible clean smooth flooring at times when other staff and visitors are not around. Other sensible precautions include using barriers to define which areas are wet and cleaning

large flooring areas in sections so there is a safe, dry route for those using the area.

It should be noted that warning signs are not as effective as barriers in keeping people from walking on wet floors. Though putting out a sign to warn of a wet floor or ongoing cleaning activity is a sensible precaution, if this is the only precaution taken, it is unlikely to significantly reduce the risk of someone slipping. Such warning signs may not give a clear indication of what and where the hazard is at a glance and if they are left out for long periods of time they can be overlooked by regular users of the area and can even become a trip hazard themselves.

- **Ensure that the cleaning process does not leave trip hazards in walkways.** The most common hazards are bags of waste and trailing cables from equipment.
- **Protect staff involved in the process from slipping themselves while cleaning the floors.** Whilst it may be possible to exclude visitors and others from smooth flooring whilst it is wet and slippery, staff cleaning it will obviously have access to it and there will be a significantly increased risk to them. Appropriate slip-resistant footwear is an excellent way to protect cleaning staff from slipping. Slip resistant soles are available on a range of non-safety footwear including trainers and overshoes. However, selecting suitable shoes is made difficult by poor standards. [Module 5.6, Preventing slips: Footwear](#) considers the slip resistance of footwear, including how to select appropriate footwear.


## Challenges for historic properties

General cleaning in historic properties is similar to cleaning in most other commercial environments. However, it is less likely that some premises will have dedicated cleaning staff with it being undertaken by staff with other job roles or frequently by volunteers. For some larger premises, conservation cleaners may be employed to clean historic surfaces, fabrics etc. of dust and other contaminants brought in by visitors. Frequently though, they are concerned with just the conservation aspects rather than generally making premises clean and safe.

In circumstances where cleaning is only one part of someone's job, it is often seen as the most simple or unimportant. This can sometimes lead to poor cleaning standards or insufficient precautions being taken. In many cases, where cleaning is undertaken by volunteers, they may not have received any training on what is expected in the different areas they are responsible for or why cleaning is such a critical task.

## Other possible solutions

These include:

- **Provide suitable spill stations in high-risk areas** (e.g. bar areas, workshops) so that unexpected spills can be dealt with quickly.
  - **Plan and document all cleaning activities, both routine and reactive.** This should include information on how to carry out the cleaning itself so that it effectively removes contamination from floors; any precautions that need to be taken to reduce the risk of slips and any checks or inspections that need to be made once the cleaning is complete.
  - **Ensure that staff are trained** in both the cleaning method and the importance of good cleaning as a means of preventing slips. If staff understand why they have been asked to clean in a specific way or using a particular approach, they are less likely to take shortcuts that can undermine effective cleaning.
  - **Supervise staff undertaking cleaning tasks** to make sure that the planned approach remains practical and relevant. If staff are not following the planned approach it may be that they lack the right equipment or that the approach needs changing.
  - **Remove warning signs as soon as it is safe to do so**, once the floor is dry so that they remain effective.
  - **Keep walkways free of trip hazards whilst cleaning is ongoing.** This can be achieved by planning the cleaning route, training staff to use the nearest socket for electrical equipment or using battery powered equipment that does not require cables.
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- Remove warning signs as soon as it is safe to do so.*
- **Ensure that all cleaning equipment is properly maintained and replaced where it is defective;** stocks of cleaning chemicals etc. are monitored and maintained at appropriate levels so that it remains possible to complete any cleaning in the way it has been planned.
  - **Consider providing slip-resistant footwear or overshoes** for the staff undertaking the cleaning itself (see [module 5.6, Preventing slips: Footwear](#)).

## Need to contact us?

For further advice Ecclesiastical customers can call our Risk Management Advice Line on **0345 600 7531** (Monday to Friday 09:00 to 17:00, excluding Bank Holidays) or email us at [risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com](mailto:risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com) and one of our experts will call you back within 24 hours.

