

5.4 Preventing Slips: People

Human behaviour and individual capability will influence how likely someone is to slip and suffer an injury as a result of a fall.

Introduction

As all falls involve an individual, it is very easy to conclude that these are entirely due to human error; the person should have been paying more attention.

While human error will occur in most slip and trip accidents, the error is often made much more likely by the environment and the task the individual was attempting to complete.

Best practice

These include:

- **Review how people access and use premises** (including how they behave whilst they are there), to identify slip and trip hazards along with any additional precautions that may be needed. This should consider all users of the premises (e.g. staff, volunteers, contractors, members of the public etc.), with a particular focus on the most vulnerable, to ensure that they are able to access the premises and enjoy them safely.
- **Implement suitable physical precautions** (e.g. the provision of barriers) to influence the way in which people behave.
- **Provide relevant information** (including the use of signs, if appropriate), on the hazards presented and the precautions to be taken, so that people can make informed choices about the risk they face and moderate their behaviour accordingly.

- **Provide adequate information and training for staff and volunteers** so that they know how to work safely and protect others.
- **Monitor how people access and use premises** to ensure that precautions remain effective and identify new slip or trip hazards as they present themselves.
- **Avoid a tendency to blame the individual without first considering other factors.** When investigating any slip or trip accident, it is easy to overlook an issue with the design of the premises, or the activities being undertaken, if you focus purely on human error. If the error happened because of a design issue and your investigation doesn't get to the true root cause, you can't address it to protect other people in future.

Challenges for historic properties

Historic properties can attract a wide range of visitors accessing the public areas of the site. This will naturally include those who are older or have some form of disability. Older people and those with certain medical conditions can be at higher risk of slipping or tripping and suffering an injury following a fall. For example, a person with a visual impairment may be less likely to see a hazard.

Whilst public areas may be carefully managed, staff and volunteers will often work in 'back of house' areas. In many instances, because of the historic nature of the buildings, these may have challenging features such as steep, uneven stairs or concealed trip hazards. Where this work is done by volunteers who may themselves be elderly, the risk of a fall will be greater.

Increasingly, historic properties are used as venues for special events such as weddings, or concerts, including others also held at night (e.g. ghost tours, sleepovers etc.). During these events the risk of slips or trips may be increased due to people's behaviour, especially where alcohol is being consumed. Alcohol intake impairs judgement and increases the risk of human error. This applies to all people who have been drinking, not just those who are very intoxicated. After only a few drinks, a person is more likely to slip or trip over a hazard than when sober. Therefore, it is critical that environmental hazards are minimised in areas hosting functions where alcohol is served.

Other possible solutions

These include:

- **Review the 'visitor journey'** and monitor the behaviour of how people actually use your premises to identify slip and trip hazards.
 - **Make the environment as safe as possible** (see [modules 5.0, 6.0 and 7.0](#)) to minimise the risk to your most vulnerable users (e.g. the elderly, those less able, people who have been drinking). Focus on removing environmental hazards, such as loose paving slabs or trailing cables; highlight permanent hazards, such as kerbs or single steps; and ensure that lighting levels are suitable. These could be subject to conservation requirements so check with your local officer.
- For buildings where a significant number of elderly users are expected, information can be found within ['Good Practice in Design for Dementia and Sight Loss'](#). The document, prepared by the Dementia Services Development Centre at the University of Stirling, provides excellent guidance on designing environments for the elderly and visually impaired. Though it focuses on domestic environments it contains information relevant to many areas in historic properties, such as toilets.
- **Train staff and volunteers to offer guidance and assistance** to visitors, where they may access areas that might present particular slip or trip hazards.
 - **Provide accessible information for visitors warning of any challenging areas and access issues.** This can be given away at the entrance to the venue or when buying tickets online. Such information will help visitors understand any slip or trip hazards that might be presented and the precautions that are needed, enabling them to make informed decisions about the risks they face.
 - **Consider the capability of staff and volunteers,** as this may influence decisions on who completes what tasks to minimise the risk of injuries.
 - **Avoid high-risk activities,** such as carrying items in both hands on stairs.
 - **Provide physical barriers rather than warning signs** where it is necessary to exclude public access as a last resort (e.g. during adverse weather conditions, or in high-risk areas such as by an open well), as these are much more effective.

- **Provide alternative ways for people with restricted mobility to view areas that are difficult to access,** such as rooms up steep spiral staircases. A webcam or short video can allow visitors to view the areas without risking a fall. Useful information on this is set out in Historic England's document '[Easy Access to Historic Environments](#)'.
- **Monitor how people access and use premises;** look for the routes people naturally want to take (desire lines) etc. to ensure that precautions remain effective.



Other presentation methods may help people with restricted mobility to view areas that are difficult to access.

Providing health and safety information for visitors

When it comes to preventing slips and trips in historic properties, it is often very helpful to include detail about any challenging underfoot conditions or difficult to access areas with other general visitor information. This is a good way of raising awareness before they visit or enter the premises.

There are a variety of ways of doing this including providing the information:

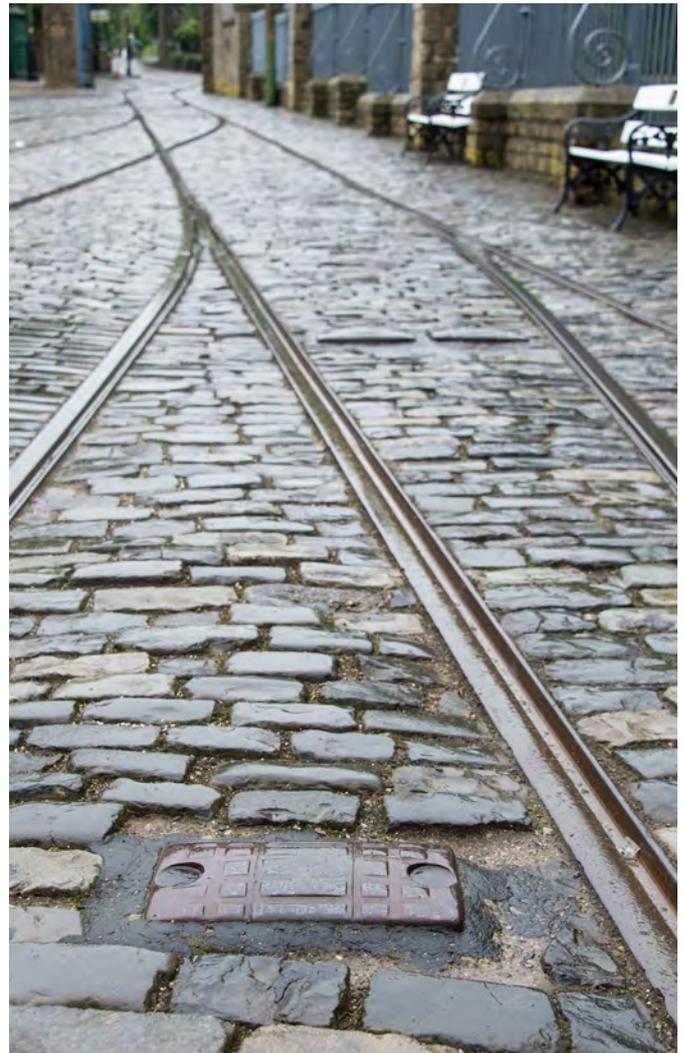
- with tickets where these are booked online
- with other, more general access information (say, as part of an access statement)
- by including it on your website
- in attraction leaflets provided at the entrance to the premises
- anywhere that tickets are purchased on site
- verbally when visitors arrive at the premises
- in any commentary in an audio guide
- on information or other safety signs displayed at the premises.

For slips and trips, it may be necessary to provide information for visitors on:

- the condition of footpaths and access to different parts of the site where these may present a significant hazard (e.g. because of their surface condition, steepness etc.)
- any areas of the site that may be difficult to access (e.g. upper floors accessed by steep or heavily worn stairs), detailing what alternative means of access or viewing these areas are available (if any)
- any specific slip or trip hazards found at the site which may be unusual or where other visitors have experienced problems in the past
- any specific clothing or equipment recommended for certain areas of the premises or for participation in certain activities.

You may have to consider how this information is made available so that it is accessible to all, particularly:

- where English may not be the first language
- for those who may be visually impaired
- where the message needs to be tailored for the intended audience (e.g. signs for children in play areas).



It can be helpful to highlight challenging underfoot conditions within other general visitor information.

Using safety signs

In preventing slips and trips, the use of safety signs is considered the least effective precaution that can be taken. This is because signs do nothing to remove the hazard itself. They can be easily ignored, particularly if they are poorly designed or situated.

Over time, people may get used to them being there and disregard their message (e.g. wet floor signs that are poorly placed or left out after the floor is dry). Also, their message may not be interpreted correctly making the information useless (e.g. where English may not be the first language for some visitors or where children are involved).

Having said this, appropriate signs do have a role to play in warning people of a particular slip or trip hazard. For example, they can warn people of hazards that are not immediately obvious. They can also be relatively cheap to make and install.

However, they should only be used after all other relevant precautions have been put in place. For example, barriers are much more effective than signs at warning people of a hazard. In some cases, it might be necessary to restrict access to certain areas that are too dangerous.

Frequently, signs can be sympathetically installed, striking a balance between ensuring safety and maintaining the aesthetic of the premises. For example, they can be hung with chains so that they do not spoil ornate architraves, or displayed on free-standing boards that can be put out when the premises are open.

In order to be effective signs must:

- be visible and easy to read (see details about Light Reflectance Value (LRV) contrast set out in [module 6.3, Preventing trips: Walkways, highlighting trip hazards](#))
- be installed near the relevant hazard
- carry a simple message, considering any potential language barriers and using suitable imagery.

On this latter point, the [Health and Safety \(Safety Signs and Signals\) Regulations](#) detail requirements for safety signs. This includes their size, colour, shape and format of any text. Whilst the regulations only apply in specific circumstances, using signs that comply with them where appropriate makes sense. Further information is available on [HSE's website](#).

Best practice includes:

- only use signs where all other precautions have been put in place and a sign is still a sensible additional measure
- use signs that carry a clear and simple message, with appropriate images, illustrations and even photographs where possible
- position signs in an appropriate location so that they are visible, even when the area is busy, and clearly relate to the hazard being identified
- remove wet floor signs as soon as practical after cleaning once the floor is dry
- inspect and maintain signs to ensure that they remain effective.



A clear sign with an image gives a strong message.

Typical slips and trips signage

Details	Meaning or Purpose	Example	Instruction or Information
<p>Circular shape</p> <p>Black pictogram</p> <p>Red edging and diagonal line</p>	Prohibition sign	 <p>No access for unauthorised persons</p>	Signs prohibiting behaviour likely to increase or cause danger
<p>Triangular shape</p> <p>Black pictogram</p> <p>Yellow background</p>	Warning sign	 <p>Danger</p> <p>Slippery surface</p>  <p>Obstacles</p>	Signs giving warning of a hazard or danger

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