



HS Broadcast – Slips, trips and falls

In the year 2002 20.2% of all reportable injuries were as a result of slips, trips and falls; this is second only to Manual Handling injuries which were at 36.9%. By 2010 this number has increased to 37%, with 28% of all fatalities in the workplace being as a result of slips, trips and falls. By 2012 slips, trips and falls accounted for 53% of all major reported injuries.

Regretfully, the Co-op has been heavily fined following an accident in which a customer was killed in a slipping accident. In July 2015 74-year-old Stanley May visited the Truro branch of the Co-op. In the chilled food aisle there was a wet area of flooring where water had been leaking from a faulty sandwich chiller. Mr May slipped over, striking his head. He died two days later in hospital.

We all know that it is not uncommon to see a slippery floor in a supermarket; this can be for a number of reasons; cleaning activities, dropped fruit, product spillages or leaking equipment. In my experience supermarkets, in general, act very quickly in dealing with any spillages and will have a supply of mops and buckets, wet floor signs, matting, etc. at the ready. However, in this case in Truro the chiller had been leaking for 44 hours prior to the accident but customers had been allowed unrestricted access to the area.

Management had initially taken the correct approach by attempting to stop the leak at source. Engineers had been called in when the machine broke down, but it had continued to leak. Staff had also put up a wet floor sign. However, the prosecution explained that the wet area of flooring

extended beyond the sign so this appears not to have been adequate as a means of risk control.

Any risk assessment should examine the hazards associated with those at risk; visitors, young people, employees, etc. and in any public place, like a supermarket then the risk assessment should be extended to consider the elderly, disabled, people pushing prams, etc.

In this particular case the supermarket should have done more and the Co-op pleaded guilty to a charge of failing to protect members of the public, under section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. It was fined £400,000 and ordered to pay prosecution costs of £50,000.

As the statistics above show, slips and trips are the single most common cause of major injury accidents in UK workplaces, therefore wet floors need to be treated seriously and with urgency.

There is a logical order in which to control and then eliminate the hazard.

1. Fixing the leak
2. Removing the source
3. Contain the liquid in a tray
4. If the wet floor cannot be avoided, or if there will be a delay in making the area safe, staff should follow pre-determined procedures.
5. Following the clean-up, the floor should be left as dry as possible and then a wet floor sign displayed.