

## Indoor Slips & Falls: The Hidden Hazards

Indoor slip and falls continue to occur. For some it's an embarrassing moment but for others it's a life changing experience. While our average cost to settle a claim is \$19,000, the individual cost to settle can be in the millions. That's a lot of money to pay towards something that can be prevented through good housekeeping and a comprehensive maintenance program.

### Why do people slip and fall?

A leading cause of indoor slip and falls is a slippery floor surface. Other causes are mats that are frayed and/or curled up, worn linoleum, cluttered entrance, walkways and stairwells, debris on floor surfaces and stairs and poor or insufficient lighting in entryways, walkways and stairwells.

### The Duty of Care

The law (Statutory and/or Common Law) imposes a duty of care upon owners of public buildings to maintain their premises in a reasonable state so that persons entering their facilities are reasonably safe.

### The Reasonable Person Standard

A reasonable duty of care can be met by adopting and following good housekeeping and maintenance practices. Maintaining logs and regularly documenting inspections and work performed will support the duty of care taken to prevent slip and falls.

### Good Housekeeping and Maintenance Practices

- Maintain a regular floor inspection schedule and inspect more frequently during inclement weather.
- Clean spills immediately when notified or you first become aware.
- Mop all wet areas immediately and continually when the weather dictates.
- Mark wet areas to warn visitors that the area is wet and slippery.
- Position the markings in such a way that visitors will see them but not trip over them.
- Sweep up debris immediately.
- Keep walkways, entrances and stairwells free of obstacles and clutter.

- Make sure floor tiles and staircases are in a good state of repair and not a trip hazard.
- Keep all entrances, walkways and stairwells well lit.
- Place mats in high risk areas, such as entrances and walk surfaces that lead from the shower to the change area.
- Rugs that are worn, frayed and curled up must be replaced immediately.
- Include light bulbs and stairwells in your regular inspection protocol.
- Instruct workmen to cordon off their work areas from the public walkways. Remind them that this is a public building and not a construction site.

### Consider the following

- Is your slip resistant floor still slip resistant?
- Do the floor cleaning products make it slippery and unsafe? Do they interfere with any slip resistant coatings?
- Should the floors be treated with a slip resistant coating?
- Are inspection and maintenance logs kept up to date?
- Is each inspection and floor maintenance procedure recorded including the date and time?
- Where are the logs kept?
- How long are they kept?

### Preventable not Avoidable

Slip and falls inside buildings are preventable but not always avoidable. There will always be those visitors that are in a hurry, distracted and/or on their cell phones. There will always be those who choose fashionable footwear over appropriate shoes. So, falls will occur and actions will be launched for injuries sustained. But as the reasonable standard applies to the building owner it also applies to visitors.

We have been successful in defending actions against our building owners when they have been able to prove, through documentary evidence, that their premises were maintained in a reasonable state so persons entering their facilities were reasonably safe. The plaintiff doesn't always win.