

## WHAT IS A “SAFE FLOOR”?

*“Unclean and unsafe floors are the cause of approximately 50 percent of slip and fall accidents in foodservice establishments, followed by: inappropriate footwear, fraudulent claims, inadequate hazard identification and insufficient employee training.”*

It’s every restaurant manager or owner’s worst nightmare—arriving to work and hearing that the new prep cook fell while hosing down the kitchen area during closing the night before or that a patron slipped after a soft drink spill. In addition to causing injury to restaurant staff or patrons, these accidents can cost a restaurant thousands—or millions—of dollars in legal fees and settlements. They can also result in a public relations nightmare that can cast a lasting shadow over an organization for years.

While you might have several wet floor signs and a program dedicated to cleaning up spills, this is not enough to protect your restaurant from the issues associated with a slip-and-fall accident.

For example, a Texas woman was recently awarded \$5.67 million by a U.S. District Court for injuries sustained in a slip and fall accident at a major fast food restaurant chain in Maui. Her attorney claimed that the woman stood up from the table and slipped on a section of floor where something had previously spilled. During the trial, he argued that “the restaurant’s overall cleaning practice was not good.”

Due to the frequency of incidents and resulting settlements, standards organizations and legislative authorities are looking to improve regulations around slip and fall accidents. To mitigate risk from injuries and lawsuits, it’s time to start thinking about a comprehensive floor maintenance program that takes into account all contributors to a safe floor including floor type, traction treatment, cleaning methods and maintenance frequency.

### **Changing Standards: Grounds for Litigation**

One of the occupational safety groups and standards organizations looking to enhance floor safety regulations is the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)—a group that’s no stranger to the foodservice industry. OSHA recently partnered with the Restaurant Opportunities Center, a non-profit group dedicated to winning improved conditions for restaurant workers and raising public recognition of restaurant workers’ contributions. According to a press release, the partnership is designed to “help reduce and prevent worker exposures to slip, trip and fall, and cut and burn hazards.”

However, OSHA is not the only organization targeting slips and falls. The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) is in the process of releasing a set of standards to help improve the guidelines governing slips and falls. These standards have implications for foodservice operators who don’t have safe floor programs in place, because it offers leverage for plaintiffs and prosecutors in slip and fall claims. If foodservice operators do not show due diligence in implementing a program to protect workers and patrons from a

slip and fall accident, it is easier for a plaintiff to demonstrate negligence. ANSI standards are helping define how businesses should approach their safe floor program.

The first standard, B101.1, was released in 2009 and established the measurement procedure and traction ranges required to remediate walkway surfaces. Updated standards that identify the floor cleaners and treatments or specify the installation, inspection, care and maintenance of entrance mats and runners, have either been released or are scheduled for release in 2012.

“It can benefit foodservice operators to at least be aware of the new standards,” said Russ Kendzior, President of the National Floor Safety Institute (NFSI). “They establish the specific criteria and protocol needed to not only test the traction of floors, but also the components necessary to develop and maintain a program that helps reduce the opportunity of slips and falls from happening.”

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### **Developing a Safe Floor Program**

While the design of a kitchen and workflow of the foodservice operations play a critical part in the safety of a floor, ongoing maintenance procedures play an equally important role in protecting employees and guests. Floors might start out clean at the start of the shift, but by the end of the night, soil – largely grease, oil or food residue—is tracked from the kitchen throughout many areas in the restaurant. This soil, when pushed into semi-porous substrates such as granite or tile, can create a slippery surface which is conducive to slips and falls.

“Research shows that the single most important factor in determining the slip resistance of a floor is how it’s cleaned and maintained – not the floor’s type, finish or cleaner,” said Dave Ludwin, General and Products Liability Risk Control Director at CNA. “Consequently, foodservice operators need to make sure they have the right program in place to protect their employees and reduce their exposure to potential liability claims.”

A safe floor program involves three essential steps: deep clean, protect and maintain.

**Deep Clean.** The first step in revitalizing a floor surface to prevent slips and falls is with a thorough deep cleaning, which should be completed in the front and back of the house. Daily vacuuming and mopping reduces particulates in flooring, but they fail to capture and remove all contaminants. As a result, floors become worn out over time, and white grout lines become black from grease and other organic buildup. Periodic deep cleanings revive floors to enhance the image of the business and protect staff and patrons.

By combining temperature, agitation, chemicals, time (TACT) and extraction, deep cleaning removes all dry particulate soil and residue left behind by conventional cleaning methods like mopping or sweeping.

With restored floors, foodservice operators promote a positive image for everyone who enters the building and demonstrate a commitment to cleanliness and safety. Restorative cleaning can also be combined with a traction treatment, particularly with quarry tiles, to increase the traction by removing surface polishing of the tile due to foot traffic and rejuvenating the naturally rough tile surface.

**Protect.** Once floors are restored, the next step is to protect them from indoor and outdoor contaminants that could create conditions conducive to a slip and fall accident.

Mats act as the first line of defense in buildings by capturing dirt and water before it enters the facility. Strategically place mats throughout the restaurant to capture dirt and water and reduce slips and falls. At entrances, combine rubber scraper mats outside of the building with carpet mats inside to reduce the amount of water, dirt and contaminants tracked into the facility.

Limit tracking of interior soil by placing matting in critical locations such as expo areas or in transitional walkways, such as those leading from the kitchen to dining areas. This helps prevent common foodservice materials such as grease, oil or other organic matter from building up throughout guest areas, improving image and limiting hazards.

The National Floor Safety Institute (NFSI) tests mats in laboratory and “real world” settings to ensure mats meet the highest safety standards. Select mats that are certified “High Traction” by the NFSI to reduce the risk of slips, trips and falls.

**Maintain.** Daily floor maintenance is essential to a clean and safe foodservice operation. Dedicate one mop to each area within the restaurant – one mop and bucket each for kitchen, dining and restroom areas. This helps further reduce the chance for cross contamination. Before cleaning, also make sure the tools are clean. A dirty mop fails to remove dirt and increases the risk of cross contamination between departments.

However, damp or wet mopping by itself doesn’t clean a floor. Agitation using deck brushing or other tools that work with a mop (including an autoscrubber for larger areas) is important to keep surfactants and soils from building up on the floor. In addition, proper dilution is essential to ensuring floor care chemicals work properly. Many foodservice operators use wall dispensing units that properly dilute chemicals and ensure there isn’t an excess or lack of chemical. Provide ongoing training so employees know how to properly clean floors and reinforce cleaning frequencies with checklists so other team members know exactly when floors were last cleaned.

## **Risky Business**

A slip and fall accident can happen instantly and without warning, yet it will likely leave an indelible mark on the business for years down the road. Injury, lawsuits, negative publicity and a tarnished reputation are just a few of the implications that come along with a slip and fall accident. To mitigate these risks, foodservice operators are looking to protect their business – and their staff and patrons – with a safe floor program. By understanding new standards and establishing protocol to protect, maintain and deep clean floors, foodservice professionals can reduce the risk of a slip and fall accident – and its long-term impact.

*Consider the following four areas for matting placement to help limit indoor contaminants from slips and falls:*

**Entrance Zones:** *These areas include front and back entrances and peripheral doors that lead to the outdoors.*

**High-Risk Zones:** *This includes transitional walkways between risk areas. For example, spaces between the kitchen and front-of-house areas or offices and hallways leading from bathrooms to dining areas are particularly susceptible.*

**High-Traffic Zones:** *Most hallways and corridors in restaurants are considered to be high-traffic zones and should be protected with a matting program. Also consider cashier and check-out stations.*

**Productivity Zones:** *Areas where staff members or patrons frequently stand, such as work stations, check-out counters or waiting areas, can be*