Controlling Slips & Falls in Restaurants

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Statement of the Problem

More than 3 million food service employees and over 1 million guests are injured annually as a result of restaurant slips and falls, according to the National Floor Safety Institute (NFSI). A 2007 NSFI study indicates that the industry spends over $2 billion on such injuries each year and that these injuries are increasing at a rate of about 10% annually.

According to the National Restaurant Association, slips and falls are the greatest source of general liability insurance claims within the restaurant industry.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can help most restaurants lower their risks for slip-and-fall incidents.

Flooring

- Select high-traction, slip-resistant flooring materials when you build, expand or remodel facilities. Installation of such materials with proven high traction characteristics is one of the best ways to avoid slip-and-fall issues.

- Know what the “out-of-the-box” slip resistance is on the floor materials in your facility. These numbers provide a baseline when considering changes to cleaning and floor maintenance practices. Have flooring coefficient of friction (COF) audited after installation to confirm slip resistance.

Cleaning Products

- Select floor cleaning and maintenance products with proven slip resistance characteristics that are compatible with the particular flooring surfaces in your facility. Good places to start are materials certified by the National Floor Safety Institute (www.nfsi.org).

- Be alert for workers substituting cleaning materials or supplies. Ensure sufficient quantities of cleaning supplies are available.

- Verify with the cleaning personnel that they are familiar with and are using the correct application procedures. If there is a change in personnel or contractor, monitor usage again.

- Remove any unauthorized or incompatible cleaning products and educate staff of the potentially dangerous consequences using the wrong products can have on the slip resistance of flooring surfaces.

- Separate cleaning materials and equipment between the “front of the house” and “back of the house” to reduce the likelihood of transporting a problem from one area to another. Color coding materials can provide instant recognition for personnel using the wrong equipment in the wrong area of the facility.

Carpet Runners and Mats

- Ensure that permanently installed features like carpet runners and mats are included in the maintenance and housekeeping program. These materials need to be regularly inspected for the buildup of contaminants and deterioration that could lead to the creation of fall hazards. Keep in mind that while mats reduce the likelihood of producing slips, improperly maintained mats can create trip hazards. Consider using mats that have been certified by the NFSI.

- Limit the difference in heights between flooring surfaces and mats to no more than ¼” to ½”. Frequently inspect mats to ensure they have not buckled or curled. Make sure that your mats are firmly secured to the floor to prevent migration and that the floor beneath the mat is clean and dry. Make sure to evaluate the condition of these changes in height since they can deteriorate and create trip hazards.

- One of the surest ways to prevent the transmission of grease, water and other materials from the “back of the house” to the “front of the house” is to implement a good mat program. Ensure the mats are frequently inspected and checked regularly for wear and the buildup of contaminants. A poorly managed and maintained mat program can significantly increase your likelihood of reducing the slip resistance of flooring surfaces.

Hazard Identification

- Regularly review all the slip-and-fall incident reports associated with your facility and understand the critical factors associated with them. Look for trends in location, time of day, etc., and focus staff training on your cleaning procedures for these factors. Train your workers how to properly respond to slip-and-fall incidents.

- Ensure that staff is well trained in spill prevention and response programs. They need to know where the materials are located and how to use them in the event of an emergency. It's also important that staff understand the importance of reporting incidents and conditions that could result in incidents, even if none have actually occurred. These will be your first indication of a potential issue that should be addressed.

- A walkway auditing program can help identify trends within your facility that can result in reduced slip resistance to flooring surfaces. To be effective, the testing should be completed in a consistent manner and include more than a single set of measurements. Consider using NFSI Certified walkway auditors. A complete list can be found on www.nfsi.org.

- Maintaining open and clear communication between the staff, cleaning personnel and the walkway floor auditor is crucial to the identification of trends and elimination of factors that could reduce the slip resistance on floor surfaces.

Employee Training

- Train employees about established safety procedures, cleaning operations, and inspection procedures.

- Train workers to apply floor cleaning and maintenance products in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.

- Post written slip and fall prevention and accident handling policies in conspicuous places.

- Keep records of all employee training including individuals trained, subject matter covered, training materials, and date of training.

Employee Footwear

- Consider foreseeable conditions in the employee walking/working environment. For those employees that may be exposed to oily, wet or otherwise slippery walking surfaces, provide access to slip resistant footwear and make it a requirement.

- Consult with your supplier or manufacturer of footwear to select shoes that are the most appropriate for the situation.

Through the OSHA and ISSA Alliance, ISSA developed this checklist for informational purposes only. It does not necessarily reflect the official views of OSHA or the U.S. Department of Labor. 12/2009.