

Flawed floor?

According to HSE statistics, slips and trips in the workplace are still increasing – and costing employers dearly. Steed Webzell investigates measures that make a difference

A recent survey of 1,500 IOSH (Institute of Occupational Safety & Health) members revealed that slips and trips are the most recognised safety hazard in the workplace. Yet just 22% of respondents use key preventive measures, such as testing for floor slipperiness.

Not good, particularly when IOSH and others insist that those responsible for health and safety have a duty to assess flooring surfaces. They point to two methods recommended by HSE – the Pendulum test and the Surtronic Duo surface roughness test. Both are covered in the HSE's Slips Assessment Tool package, which is free at www.hsesat.info. Plant engineers should also read www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/web/slips01.pdf. Alternatively, slip testing consultancy Ceram has published a guide, also free, at www.ceram.com/slip.

For managers, there are two more points. First, watch for documentation that may help your defence in the event of a claim: in particular, carry out pre- and post-accident risk assessments, but also keep safe operating procedures, and inspection and maintenance records. Second, choose the right flooring: the legislation most frequently quoted in claims is Regulation 12 of Workplace (Health and Safety) 1992, which states: 'Every floor in the workplace and the surface of every traffic route ... shall be of construction such that [it] is suitable for the purpose for which it is used.' And it's much the same for surface condition.

Matting matters

One of the cheapest and most effective ways of dealing with flooring issues is protective matting. New products include Solid Fatigue Step Nitrile and Fatigue Step Grit-Top – both 100% nitrile from Cobra Europe. While the former has a textured solid top surface, providing some slip-resistance, the latter has a robust gritted top layer to counter slipping, even in wet or oily areas.

Other products reduce strain due to standing for long periods, particularly on hard floors. For operatives handling aircraft wheels at British Airways' engineering and maintenance facility at Heathrow airport (above inset), that was overcome by equipping workstations with Zed Chex anti-fatigue matting, from Plastic Extruders. Its makers



claim the matting also helps counter bone damage, poor circulation and back problems.

On the other hand, the supplier also installed Vynagrip matting alongside acid baths at anodising company Metro Plating of Uxbridge, where the requirement was slip-resistant walkways, but, in

this case, impervious to acids.

Meanwhile, where localised matting is not appropriate or sufficient, plant engineers typically seek coatings such as topically applied resins, particularly where fork lift truck operations or industrial processes have damaged concrete floors.

Sikafloor Pronto is one resin flooring system, based on polymethyl methacrylic technology comprising a primer, a self-smoothing screed and a seal coat. In average temperatures, it can be walked on within one hour of being laid. Elsewhere, resin flooring manufacturer Resin Surfaces teamed with REME Industrial Flooring to refurbish a concrete floor in the production hall at Wrexham-based Magellan Aerospace. It had become difficult to clean and posed safety issues, so REME was approached to fit a hard-wearing, anti-corrosive, slip-resistant resin-based flooring system.

But technology is marching on. SkidProof International has secured the global rights to a patented anti-slip treatment, said to be the world's first to use nanotechnology. The simple-to-apply coating apparently dries to a tough, flexible, transparent and slip-resistant finish, and requires no specialist maintenance. **RE**

Above: Sikafloor Pronto resin floor
Left: British Airways engineers on Zed Chex anti-fatigue matting

Pointers

- Slips and trips are the most recognised safety hazard in the workplace
- The vast majority of plants do not use preventive measures such as floor slipperiness testing
- HSE recommends the Pendulum test and the Surtronic Duo surface roughness test
- HSE's Slips Assessment package is available free
- Keep records of safe operating procedures, and inspection and maintenance
- Carry out pre- and post-accident risk assessments