PROTECTOR

WINTER PRECAUTIONS – SLIPS, TRIPS & FALLS

RISK MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE

Introduction

An increase of slip, trip and fall related accidents over the winter months is influenced by a variety of factors. The hours of daylight are less, paths and walkways can become both wet and slippery and a deterioration of weather conditions can cause ice and snow to build up on roads and paths. Many slips, trips and falls on snow or ice may lead to just minor bumps and bruises however, according to The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents[1], thousands of people have been admitted to hospital after suffering more serious injuries following a fall due to winter conditions.

The Issues

In addition to the challenges presented by daylight hours and weather conditions, this year Covid-19 will impact mitigation strategies. The requirement of social distancing, one way systems and regularly changing rules from Government mean that organisations must factor in extra precautions within risk assessments and planning. Furthermore, with localised lockdowns and different rules sometimes applied in neighbouring areas it is important that any signage and measures put in place are both clear and up to date to avoid confusion by members of the public.

Next Steps

The remainder of this document will highlight factors contributing to slips, trips and falls with associated good practice to help minimise the risk, taking the additional issues raised above into account. As an extra resource, a short checklist to assist with your winter preparedness is included at the end of this document.

Wet weather

During wet weather, conditions underfoot may change considerably depending on the surface of paths and the volume of rainfall creating puddles of water. Similar to potholes on road surfaces, damaged areas on paths are also susceptible to filling with rainwater and their true depth can be unclear to users.

Attempt to discourage employees and the public from taking shortcuts from paths, such as over grassy areas or dirt tracks which are likely to become slippery when wet. If users are bypassing a designated path with a shortcut, are you able to convert this shortcut into a proper path?

[1] www.rospa.com/resources/hubs/winter#slipstrips

According to the HSE[2], many slip accidents happen at building entrances as people entering carry rainwater in on their shoes. Fitting canopies of a good size, in the right position and with the right materials can help prevent this. Furthermore, with current protocols in place such as sanitising stations at building entrances this would provide cover for those waiting to enter the building. If your organisation is experiencing slips, trips and falls at entrances, consider the type of floor surface; can you install something which is non-slip? Large absorbent mats are used by some organisations but these should be correctly and securely fitted.

Lighting

Reduced hours of daylight have been highlighted in this document; has your organisation considered if there is sufficient lighting around your buildings and car parks for employees and members of the public to see properly and avoid any potential hazards that may be lying on the ground?

A simple way is to ask your employees if they feel areas are sufficiently well lit? Ensuring a decent quality standard of lighting is in place is good practice, and this should be supported by appropriate maintenance. It is counterproductive to have great lights if their bulbs are not working.

Snow and ice

In order to reduce the risk of slips, trips and falls on snow or ice an appropriate documented risk assessment should be completed and a system put in place to manage the risk. During the winter months, this is very much a risk requiring active management as temperatures may drop or heavy snowfall can move in quickly. This means keeping ahead of the weather and monitoring the forecast via services such as the *Met Office,* or monitoring of your own ice warning systems/devices.

Procedures should be put in place to prevent icy surfaces from forming and actively warning users not to use them. Areas that have an element of shelter and are closer to the building may receive some protection, but exposed areas known to be slippery in such conditions should be gritted or closed off using temporary barriers.

An example of this is in car parks, where the surface can be somewhat uneven in parts, has been wet and frozen over. Using warning cones to prevent users from using these areas is good practice, but don't forget to remove them once conditions have improved or users may ignore them.

Risk Management Advice

Slips, trips and falls are one of the most common types of accident ~~in life~~ generally, so when winter weather conditions set in they become more prevalent. Organisations have a duty to take reasonable care to ensure the safety of those using their land.

Clearing snow and ice

The two main things to keep in mind when clearing snow or ice is that you must not make the conditions worse, for example pouring water over a pavement which can refreeze and create a black

[2] www.hse.gov.uk/logistics/slips-trips-bad-weather.htm

ice surface is not acceptable. If you are going to do the job, do it well and be prepared to return periodically to clear the area or grit it more than once as conditions change.

Where possible, clear snow and ice early in the day as it's easier to move fresh, loose snow. Use salt if possible as this will melt the snow and ice and stop it refreezing again overnight. Pay close attention when clearing steps and steep pathways; using additional salt may help.

Gritting

One of the most common methods of de-icing surfaces is gritting. Grit is a fairly cost effective option that is both quick to apply and easy to spread over wide areas. Highways authorities tend to use rock salt (plain and treated) as grit for paths and roads.

Salt can stop ice forming as well as melting existing ice. It is most effective when ground down, but this increases the time required to spread it, so consider how long it will take to grit paths. It is possible to lay grit in advance when snow or ice is forecast or when paths are damp/wet or temperatures are already at or approaching freezing. Typically, a good time to lay grit is early in the evening before frost settles, or early morning before path users begin to arrive – bear in mind the salt will need time to dissolve.

Laying grit when it is raining heavily may lead to the salt being washed away which can cause a problem when rain turns to snow. Compacted snow which then turns to ice is challenging to treat effectively using grit. 'Dawn frost', when early morning dew forms and freezes on impact can occur on cold dry surfaces, however it can be tricky to predict when this will occur.

Claims Defence

Claims resulting from injuries sustained through slips, trips and falls on snow or ice are commonplace. If you have the following in place you may be able to demonstrate that reasonable precautions have been taken to minimise injury:

- Documented policies, procedures and risk assessments
- A winter safety plan to including identification and prioritised gritting/salting of site roadways/pathway/car parks
- Temporary measures until snow/ice removal can be undertaken, such as signage and closing footpaths, parking spaces etc.
- Regular monitoring of temperatures
- Reference to any code of practice (such as Well Maintained Highways)

Checklist

To assist with planning and proactive steps to help prevent slips, trips and falls, consider using the checklist below to help maintain good practice:

Forward plan:

- ✓ Risk assessments for areas where employees or public will be using area for walkways
- ✓ Proactively monitor the local weather conditions days and weeks in advance
- ✓ Where necessary, apply layer of grit before ice/snow sets in
- ✓ Assess entrances to understand if extra precautions such as absorbing mats are required
- ✓ Communicate with employees and the public, let them know you are taking precautions due to the winter conditions

Lighting

- ✓ Appropriate lighting installed covering areas of high footfall such as entrances and exits
- ✓ Increase Lighting provided in more exposed areas such as car parks where hazards may be on the ground
- ✓ Regular Maintenance checks to ensure all bulbs and lights are working
- ✓ Consider time settings to incorporate changes in daylight hours

Paths

- ✓ Identify defects and areas which may fill with water and become a hazard
- ✓ Ensure correct signage is clearly displayed – if one way systems are in place for Covid-19 ensure these are also well sign posted to users
- ✓ Be mindful of shortcuts over grassy areas and dirt tracks – if necessary use warning cones to deter people from using them during bad weather
- ✓ In the long term, consider if shortcuts can be developed into proper paths

Car Parks

- ✓ Have a responsible person conduct a visual inspection of the car park daily prior to busy periods – close off any identified areas either flooded or with a build-up of snow and ice
- ✓ Remove any temporary barriers once weather conditions improve

Clearing Snow/Ice

- ✓ Where possible, clear ice and snow early when it is loose
- ✓ Don't pour boiling or cold water over paths and walk away – they may refreeze into black ice
- ✓ Clear paths well and regularly, the weather conditions will impact frequency