



Oil and Water and Shoes Don't Mix

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A body shop just received a grant from OSHA to redo the floor in its detail area. Why? Because an employee slipped on the soapy wet floor, breaking his wrist badly enough to require surgery. He wasn't doing anything unusual. His injury isn't unusual. But it was costly. And it is preventable.

Why did he slip? If we want to be technical about it, the coefficient of friction between his footwear and the walking surface was clearly too low. Combine that with gravity's insistence on exerting itself. Add in a likely attempt to catch himself, preventing head damage by thrusting out his arm so it took the force of his fall. Result: pain for him, more work for his coworkers, who had to cover for him, and more costs and stress for his employer. Prevention costs more upfront, but is a lot cheaper in the end.

If you wash cars, soap will get on the floor. If you repair cars in Minnesota winters, snow and ice will be on your floors in winter. We can't eliminate those. But there are still lots of measures to take to reduce the likelihood of slips.



Clean up spills and puddles.

- Put water-catching mats in your entryway.
- Have a zero-tolerance policy for fluid on the floor. Make it the responsibility of all employees to clean up any fluid, whether it's from a car shedding snow, a leaking oil pan, or someone's clumsiness with coffee.
- Invest in good squeegees and in good sorbents. Get away from using floor dry or cat litter for cleanup – those can be scattered around, don't have that high a capacity for fluids, and can be difficult to dispose of correctly. Instead, look at sorbent pads that can be wrung out and reused. And don't just put them down and leave them – use them to clean up.

Prevent the slip

- Install floor coatings with grit added, designed specifically for wet surfaces.
- If you have the opportunity to redo floors in wet areas, such as wash bays, look at the water flow. Make sure it does flow to your drain.
- Discourage the use of slippery shoes. You're not required to purchase footwear for employees, unless you require safety-toed footwear (which would be a good idea, by the way – and for that, you only need to provide a reasonable allowance, not the full cost). But, you can request employees to wear sturdy footwear with good tread.

Prevent the trip

- Insist that employees hang up hoses and cords.
- When you walk through your shop, look for tripping hazards. Is carpet in your office area coming up? Is a mat edge curled over? Are filing cabinet drawers left open? Are car parts left where they came off the car? Is cardboard left on the floor? If you have cords that have to be on the floor, such as many frame rack cords, cover those with a cord bridge.
- Check your floor and your drains. Is the concrete spalling? Are there holes? Pipes sticking up? Edges of the drain that are uneven?

Look outside

- Parking lots and sidewalks take a beating in Minnesota – just as roads do. If the asphalt is pot-holed, if the concrete slab has lifted up, you risk injury to employees and to customers. While you can require your employees to wear sensible shoes and to watch where they walk, you can't require the same of your customers. So keeping your lot and sidewalk in good shape is essential.
- Go outside during a rainfall. Where does the rain go? If you have water running across sidewalks or where employees normally walk, you create a slipping hazard – particularly in winter, when that water freezes. Divert it. Have a plan, such as using a salt spreader, for handling the icy spots you couldn't prevent in winter.

OSHA's SafetyPays calculator estimates direct costs of nearly \$50,000 for one fracture (that doesn't include the lost productivity, or your time in dealing with the injury, or the cost of customers displeased at the delayed delivery of their cars....). What's your profit margin? How many more sales do you need to make up for that wasted \$50,000? OSHA estimates more than a million, at a margin of 3%. That makes the time and effort required to prevent slips and falls seem like a pretty good bargain.

If you have questions about building safety, hazard prevention, handling worker injuries, OSHA grants, or general safety issues, call CHESS at 651-481-9787 or e-mail us at CHESS@chess-safety.com

<p>This article is intended to provide general information (no advice) about current safety topics. To discuss your specific concerns and how CHESS may help, please contact CHESS at 651-481-9787 or chess@chess-safety.com</p>
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