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Proactive Floor Safety New Standard Released for Prevention of Slips and Falls BY MICHAEL FRALEY

With the newest ANSI floor safety standard now published, many companies are asking how will this help in the prevention of slip-and-fall incidents? First lets get familiar with the standard itself. I'm speaking of ANSI B101.1, the scope of which will no doubt have a positive impact on floor safety.

The new standard is the first of many designed to be a key tool in the prevention of slip-and-fall incidents and recognizing potential slip-and-fall hazards. It provides a test method that specifies the procedures and devices used for both laboratory and field-testing to measure the wet static coefficient of friction or SCOF of common hard surface floor materials. The purpose is to provide a measurement procedure that establishes traction ranges that facilitate remediation of walkway surfaces when warranted.

Why the Need?

The number of slip-and-fall accidents that occur in this country each year are staggering, and the problem keeps getting worst. For example, the Centers for Disease Control estimate that 2.2 million Americans sought emergency room treatment for an accidental fall in 2007, making falls the leading cause of emergency room visits in America.

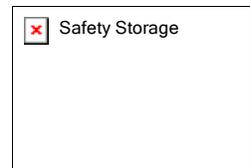
Another sobering statistic: Slip-and fall related costs run about \$60 billion per year, according to the National Floor Safety Institute (NFSI), which reports that the nation's \$494 billion grocery store industry spends \$450 million annually to defend slip-and-fall claims.

The need is great, and this new test method has the potential to significantly reduce slip-and-fall incidents if safety professionals and responsible employers choose to make good use of it.

How the Standard Can Work for You

Look at this standard as a proactive approach to identifying and reducing slip-and- fall incidents. The testing protocols are designed for wet conditions, since most accidents occur on wet surfaces. Responsible parties should embrace this standard and implement some type of testing or auditing procedure within their facility in the near future. Walkway auditing or testing should be performed by a qualified walkway auditor who has been trained to do so. Many companies are starting to embrace the need to have such a program in place, and are beginning to realize the need to be proactive rather than reactive.

Having regular walkway audits scheduled for your facility will not only show due diligence, but it will be a key tool to identify potential hazards within a facility. Once a slip-and-fall hazard is identified, the proper remediation can be taken and the risk eliminated. Not only will testing your floors help identify potential hazards in your facility, it will also help your company be in compliance with the new ANSI standard. The results will not only save your company perhaps millions in unwanted litigation, but thousands in lower insurance premiums that result from fewer claims.



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As with any solution to a problem, the devil and success are in the details. Consider establishing a documented floor safety program specifically designed for your business. Included in this program should be a number of proactive approaches that when combined within the program itself will prove to lower slip-and-fall incidents.



Just to mention a few is the need to have a scheduled walkway auditing program that is done within the facility every quarter or at the least on a yearly basis. As mentioned before, this will alert your company to any area within the facility that has low or moderate traction that would result in the need for remediation. In the event that testing does reveal the floor does not meet the ANSI standards, then a number of remedies could be used. It could be as simple as changing your cleaning procedures.



Improper cleaning procedures often cause contaminants to lower the efficiency of the floor. It may be that other methods such as treating the floor with an anti slip treatment will be necessary or asking your cleaning company or employees to start using cleaners that are designed to raise the slip resistance of the floor itself.



Another key component of your floor safety program should be requiring employees to wear slip resistant shoes. There are a number of companies that provide programs designed to help employees meet their requirements for purchasing slip resistant shoes.

Proper signage and placement of signage is also very important when alerting users of potential slip-and-fall hazards. Lastly, the need to implement some type of employee training program that deals specifically with slip-and-fall issues.

With such training should be written protocols on proper house cleaning, proper spill clean up, and when and where wet floor signs should be placed. Also included should be reporting of any and all incidents, whether they resulted in injury or not.

The Key is to Use It

The key is to use the tools you have set in place. So often, we fail not only as employers, but as employees to use the tools we have been given to protect ourselves and our customers. According to the National Floor Safety Institute, high traction floors, those with a wet SCOF of .60 or higher, have been clinically proven to reduce slip-and-fall claims by as much as 90 percent. Just imagine if these proactive measures could reduce slip-and-fall claims within your company by 70, 80 or 90 percent, what an impact that would make not only on the lives of your employees and customers, but also on your bottom line.

So, let's not turn incidents into accidents, resolve to be proactive in all your slip-and-fall prevention efforts and make use of the new ANSI B101.1 standard. FSM

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