

The Workplace and Work Equipment

Level 3 Health and Safety in the Workplace

Introduction

As was seen in the first module of this course, the first step in any risk assessment is to identify the risks that are present in your workplace.

In order to do this, you'll need to consider which aspects of the workplace and work equipment pose a risk to employees. Once these have been considered, you can then look to implement relevant control measures.

In this part of the course, you'll learn about what to look out for in terms of workplace and work equipment hazards, and develop your knowledge of the potential control measures that can be used to prevent the identified hazards from causing people harm.

Topics to be Covered

The topics covered in this section are:

- Slips, trips and falls
- Reducing the risk of slips, trips and falls
- Work equipment
- Reducing the risks from work equipment

Slips, Trips and Falls

The Labour Force Survey estimates that there are 119,000 slip, trip and fall injuries each year, and RIDDOR statistics from 2015/16 state that slips, trips and falls were accountable for 60% of all reported injuries, including 29% of injuries that resulted in seven days or more off work.

In an office environment, it's believed that slips and trips account for around 50% of all accidents, most commonly as a result of:

- Contaminated floors, such as water, spilled drinks, oils and ice.
- Obstructions in walkways.
- Poor housekeeping, such as trailing cables and poor storage around workstations.

The HSE has identified a range of human factors related to the task, the person and the environment that are likely to contribute towards slip, trip and fall accidents in the workplace. These are:

- Poor perception of risk.
- Lack of awareness of slip, trip and fall hazards.
- Failure to clean up spillages.
- Failure to report slip, trip and fall incidents.
- Inadequate remedial action to any reported problems.
- Lack of understanding of health and safety.

Reducing the Risk of Slips, Trips and Falls

Slips and trips are hazards that are simple and cost-effective for businesses to reduce. Identifying the hazards and determining control measures should be part of your company's overall risk assessment. The risks from slip and trip hazards can be reduced by:

- Identifying the key areas of risk.
- Involving employees in identifying the key areas of risk and asking for their feedback on work processes and practices.
- Providing employees with training and information on good working practices, such as housekeeping, cleaning, wearing the correct footwear etc.
- Giving managers and supervisors responsibilities to ensure that slip and trip hazards are controlled.
- Monitoring and reviewing accident statistics and investigations to see if there are any trends.

Ensuring the workplace has adequate lighting can make a big difference when looking to reduce the likelihood of slips, trips and falls occurring.

Natural light should be used wherever possible, and artificial lighting used where not possible. Lighting should also be suitable for the environment and type of work.

The aim is for the lighting to be sufficient enough to allow people to notice hazards and assess risks.

Employers should carry out a risk assessment of the workplace lighting to identify whether there are any poorly-lit areas that may cause harm or injury.

Exercise

Which three of the following are common causes of slips and trips?

- Floors contaminated with water or ice**
- Natural lighting
- Poor housekeeping**
- Obstructions in walkways**
- Scheduled cleaning activities

Work Equipment

Work equipment is defined as any equipment, machinery, appliance, apparatus, tool or installation for use at work. The scope of work equipment is therefore extremely wide.

The use of work equipment is also very widely interpreted. The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) state that the 'use of work equipment' refers to any activity involving work equipment, and includes starting, stopping, programming, setting, transporting, repairing, modifying, maintaining, servicing and cleaning.

The use of work equipment presents many risks to health and safety, so it's essential that all equipment used in the workplace is carefully considered as part of your risk assessment.

PUWER places duties on anyone who owns, operates or controls work equipment. The regulations aim to make the workplace safer by requiring all equipment to be:

- Suitable for the intended use.
- Safe for use, maintained in a safe condition and inspected to ensure it remains safe.
- Used only by people who have received adequate information, instruction and training.
- Accompanied by suitable health and safety control measures.
- Used in accordance with any specific requirements.

Reducing the Risks from Work Equipment

To help prevent accidents and injuries, you must manage the risks from all equipment used at work. This means that you should:

- Ensure the equipment is constructed or adapted to be suitable for the purpose it is used or provided for.
- Take into account the working conditions and health and safety risks in the workplace when selecting work equipment.
- Ensure work equipment is only used for suitable purposes.
- Ensure work equipment is maintained in an efficient state, in efficient working order and in good repair.
- Where a machine has a maintenance log, keep this up to date.
- Where the safety of work equipment depends on the manner of installation, have it inspected after installation and before being put into use.
- Where work equipment is exposed to deteriorating conditions liable to result in dangerous situations, have it inspected to ensure faults are detected in good time so the risk to health and safety is managed.

Anyone who uses, supervises or manages the use of work equipment must be provided with adequate and clear health and safety information. This includes, where necessary, written instructions on how to use the equipment, plus information on any equipment markings and warnings.

Anyone who uses, supervises or manages the use of work equipment must also have received adequate training on the correct use of the equipment, the risks that may arise from its use, and the safety precautions to take.

Where the use of work equipment is likely to involve a specific risk to health and safety, ensure that the use of the equipment is restricted to the people who are trained and appointed to use it.

You will also need to take effective measures to prevent access to dangerous parts of machinery. This is normally resolved by installing fixed guarding but, where routine access is needed, interlocked guards (sometimes with guard locking) may be needed to stop the movement of dangerous parts before a person can reach the danger zone.

Where this is not possible, such as with the blade of a circular saw, it must be protected as far as possible and a safe system of work should be used.

It's also important to implement measures to prevent or control the risks to people from:

- Parts and substances falling or being ejected from work equipment.
- The rupture or disintegration of work equipment.
- Very hot or cold temperatures from the work equipment or the material being processed or used.

Furthermore, all work equipment must be provided with appropriately identified controls for starting, stopping and controlling it. These control systems must also be safe.

Where appropriate, provide suitable means of isolating work equipment from all power sources, including electric, hydraulic, pneumatic and gravitational energy.

Ensure work equipment is stabilised by clamping or otherwise to avoid injury.

You should also take appropriate measures to ensure maintenance operations on work equipment can be carried out safely, while the equipment is shut down, and without exposing the person undertaking maintenance operations to health and safety risks.

When providing new equipment for use at work, employers must ensure it conforms with the essential requirements of the European Machinery Directive.

New equipment must be:

- CE marked.
- Accompanied by a Declaration of Conformity.
- Provided with instructions in English.
- Free from obvious defects.

Before putting equipment into use for the first time you should also make some simple checks, even if you've selected it carefully and are sure everything is in order. Look to make sure that the equipment isn't obviously unsafe, check that it comes with all the specified safety features, look for the user instructions (in English), and double check the conformity marks and documents.

When providing mobile elevating work equipment (MEWP), you must ensure that:

- Where employees are carried, the equipment is suitable for that purpose.
- The risks from rolling over are minimised and any person being carried is protected in the event of fall or roll-over.
- Self-propelled equipment can be controlled safely with braking devices, adequate driver vision and lighting where necessary.
- Measures are taken to prevent any risks from drive shafts that power accessories attached to mobile work equipment by using adequate guards.

When providing power presses for working on cold metal, you must thoroughly examine them and their safeguards before first putting them into use, and periodically afterwards. This means you must ensure that the inspection and testing of guards and protection devices is carried out by a competent person at frequent intervals, and that records of these examinations, inspections and tests are kept.

Exercise

In order to comply with PUWER, all work equipment must be: (select four answers)

- Maintained in a safe condition**
- Used only by people who have received adequate training**
- Accompanied by instructions in various languages
- Suitable for the intended use**
- Used only by older workers
- Accompanied by suitable health and safety control measures**

Summary

In this module, you've learnt that slips, trips and falls are some of the most common types of workplace injury, and are often as a result of poor housekeeping, bad lighting and contaminated floors. Slip, trip and fall hazards should be identified in your risk assessment, and appropriate control measures used.

This module also looked at the risks that work equipment can pose to health and safety, and at how the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations (PUWER) aim to ensure work equipment is suitable and safe for use.

No matter what type of equipment is used in your workplace, it's essential that it's used correctly by people who are appropriately trained and accompanied by relevant health and safety guidance. As with slip, trip and fall hazards, the risks to health and safety from work equipment should also be identified by your risk assessment process.