

Preparing for Autumn/Winter Weather

Slip, trip and fall accidents/incidents increase during the Autumn and Winter seasons (most commonly between 1st November and 31st March) for a number of reasons:

- There is less daylight
- Leaves fall onto paths and become wet and slippery
- Cold weather spells cause ice and snow to build up on paths.

The Law

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK ETC ACT 1974

Your responsibility to employees, members of the public.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSWA 1974) places a responsibility on employers and the occupiers of land and premises, so far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure that such land and premises are maintained in a condition that is safe and without risk to either its employees or other persons on the land or premises.

This includes ensuring that persons using the land and premises for whatever purpose are, so far as is reasonably practicable, kept safe from injury due to slip hazards including ice and snow.

Regulations state that arrangements should be made to minimise risks from snow and ice.

There is no absolute duty to ensure that every piece of land is kept totally clear of snow and ice at all times. The duty is to do what is reasonably practicable. Practicalities can include, the degree of use of the land/premises in question and the likelihood of snow and ice becoming a problem.

Snow and ice can be removed through gritting and snow clearance but closure of some areas and routes may be necessary in severe conditions.

There are effective actions that you can take to reduce the risk of a slip or trip:

Issues to consider during the Autumn months



Wet and decaying leaves

Fallen leaves that become wet or have started to decay can create slip risks in two ways

- they hide any hazard that may be on the path
- they themselves create a slip risk.

Put in place a procedure for removing leaves at regular intervals; you might even consider removing the offending bushes or trees altogether.

Rain water

In dealing with rainwater:

- When fitting external paved areas ensure that the material used will be slip resistant when wet.
- Discourage people from taking shortcuts over grass or dirt which are likely to become slippery when wet. Consider converting existing shortcuts into proper paths.
- On new sites, before laying paths, think about how pedestrians are likely to move around the site. Putting the path in the right place from the start may save you money in the long term.
- Many slip accidents happen at building entrances as people entering the building walk in rainwater. Fitting canopies of a good size over building entrances and in the right position can help to prevent this.
- If a canopy is not a possibility, consider installing large, absorbent mats or even changing the entrance flooring to one which is non-slip.

Issues to consider during the Winter months

Ice, frost, snow

Gritting

Ice, frost, snow

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) statistics show that slips, trips and falls are the most common cause of accidents within the work place. To reduce the risk of slips on ice, frost or snow, you need to assess the risk and put in a system to manage it.

Section 3 of the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires every employer to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of-

- a) the risks to the health and safety of his employees to which they are exposed whilst they are at work; and
- b) the risks to the health and safety of persons not in his employment arising out of or in connection with the conduct by him of his undertaking.

You should produce a general risk assessment for your sites or have a competent contractor write one up and these should identify:

- the hazards associated with snow and ice;
- adequate arrangements are made to ensure that the risks from snow and ice are minimised through clearance and/or gritting;
- those areas that are considered essential for use by residents/tenants, visitors and employees will be given priority; these consist of external pathways and entrances to communal blocks, car parks and refuse areas.

It has been established in the courts that a system for controlling the hazards of snow and ice discharges liability if it fulfils "best practice", but is not expected to extend to unreasonable lengths. In particular devoting the resources available to clearing the most used areas in priority to those less used, was considered reasonable. Therefore only grit or clear ice and snow from areas where use is essential and where the hazard could affect most people e.g. pathways and entrances to buildings. To reduce the risk of slips on ice, frost or snow, you need to assess the risk and put in a system to manage it.

Identify the outdoor areas used by pedestrians most likely to be affected by ice, for example: -

- building entrances
- car parks
- pedestrian walkways
- shortcuts
- sloped areas constantly in the shade or wet.

Procedures required include:

- Monitor the temperature, as prevention is key
- You need to take action whenever freezing temperatures are forecast. Keep up to date by visiting a weather service site such as the Met Office or the Highways Agency.

(There are also smart signs on the market, available to buy at low cost, which display warning messages at a certain temperature).

- Put a procedure in place to prevent an icy surface forming and/or keep pedestrians off the slippery surface;
- Use grit (see section below for more detail) or similar, on areas prone to be slippery in frosty, icy condition.
- Consider covering walkways e.g. by an arbour high enough for people to walk through, or use an insulating material smaller areas overnight;
- Divert pedestrians to less slippery walkways and barrier off existing ones.
- If warning cones are used, remember to remove them once the hazard has passed or they will eventually be ignored.

Gritting

The most common method used to de-ice floors is gritting as it is relatively cheap, quick to apply and easy to spread. Rock salt (plain and treated) is the most commonly used 'grit'. It is the substance used on public roads by the highways authority. Salt can stop ice forming and cause existing ice or snow to melt. It is most effective when it is ground down, but this will take far longer on pedestrian areas than on roads.

Gritting should be carried out when frost, ice or snow is forecast or when walkways are likely to be damp or wet and the floor temperatures are at, or below freezing. The best times are early in evening before the frost settles and/or early in the morning before employees arrive. Salt doesn't work instantly; it needs sufficient time to dissolve into the moisture on the floor.

If you grit when it is raining heavily the salt will be washed away, causing a problem if the rain then turns to snow. Compacted snow, which turns to ice, is difficult to treat effectively with grit. Be aware that 'dawn frost' can occur on dry surfaces, when early morning dew forms and freezes on impact with the cold surface. It can be difficult to predict when or where this condition will occur.

Look at using a dedicated Gritting contractor and ask about Season long contracts - This could save your sites money (generally the contract is based on the temperature below a certain level being the trigger for gritting/snow clearing action).

General issues connected with Autumn/Winter months

Lighting

Is there is enough lighting around your workplace for you and your workers to be able to see and avoid hazards that might be on the ground?

The easiest way to find out is to ask your staff or another way is to shadow your employees for a couple of days, walk the main internal and external routes that they use throughout their working day. It is important to do this both inside and outside of the workplace, as the effect of light changes during the day.

If you can't see hazards on the ground you will need to improve the lighting (e.g. new lights or changing the type of bulb).

Regardless of the size of your site, always ensure that regularly used walkways are promptly treated.

	Cold Months – Gritting Records	√ or	√ or	√ or	√ or	√ or	√ or	√ or	Comment/action taken
		x or N/A	x or N/A	x or N/A	x or N/A	x or N/A	x or N/A	x or N/A	
		MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN	
1	Snow/ice present?								
2	Snow/ice expected (E) or unexpected (U)								
3	Times of snow/ice present (can be multiple times or continuous during day)								
4	Gritting Process – Start time								
5	Gritting Process – Finish time								
6	Snow / Ice cleared away from entrances/exits?								
7	Footpaths round the site checked and cleared (Time)								
8	Access road to Loading bays/ entrance roads/ car parks gritted (Time)								
9	Contractor used? Name:								

Property Name/Address.....
 Completed by.....

Week commencing.....
 Position.....